

H . M O S E S

# THE WORLD OF MESOPOTAMIA



MYTHS, SOCIETY  
AND ORIGINS OF SUMERIAN CIVILIZATION

## **Introduction**

This book is a curated collection of in-depth articles from <https://www.historyandmyths.com>, exploring the rich cultural, religious, and social dimensions of ancient Mesopotamian civilization — with a special focus on the Sumerians.

Through myth, archaeology, and historical records, this compilation aims to provide readers with a structured and engaging journey through one of the world's first great civilizations.

Each chapter was originally published as a standalone article on our website, and all embedded links remain active to help you explore further reading on specific topics.

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Happy reading, and welcome to ancient Sumer!

**Written by H. Moses**

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# Origins of the Sumerians: Theories and History in Mesopotamia

MH [historyandmyths.com/2025/01/origins-sumerians-theories-history.html](https://historyandmyths.com/2025/01/origins-sumerians-theories-history.html)

April 20, 2025

No one knows who the ancient ancestors of the Sumerians were, and no one knows the exact origin of the Sumerians, although no one also knows the origin of many of the peoples synchronised with the Sumerians or that appeared centuries or thousands of years before them, but because of the civilizational importance of the Sumerians and the turn of history by them from prehistory to historical times. For other known reasons, many theories have been developed, and we will review the most famous of them to familiarise ourselves with the views of scholars in this field.



ancient land of sumer

## 1. Anatolian Origin Theory: Were the Sumerians from Asia Minor?

Depending on the type of Sumerian language, which is composed of unconjugated syllables such as Aryan or Semitic languages, and has



unchanging roots and its basic grammatical unit is the verbal compound and not the single word, some researchers have compared it to many other glued languages such as Turkish, Hungarian, and some Caucasian languages, especially the ancient Turanian language, where Rollinson early on raised such an opinion, then followed by Obert, and the discovery of the Sumerian language was still in its infancy, and Samuel Noah Kramer talked about the possibility that the Sumerian language belongs to the Turanian pattern. However, it is widely believed that the Sumerian language is not related to any of these attached languages, and perhaps the closest hypothesis to explain the uniqueness of the Sumerian language is that it belongs to a language family that became extinct in prehistoric times and only the Sumerian language spoken by the Sumerians in the Mesopotamian civilisation survived.

## **2. Asian Origin Theory: The relationship between the Sumerians and the Chinese**

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Some researchers believe that the Sumerians came from the plateaus and highlands of Central Asia, and that they travelled south towards Iran until they settled in southern Iraq. Their evidence for this Iranian route is the similarity of Ubaid period pottery

coloured pottery in Iraq and Iran (which, of course, does not prove their point, but rather the spread of Ubaid period pottery towards Iran.

The two researchers (Pali and litt) have gone further, and through their meticulous research into Chinese and Sumerian cuneiform writing in their book (Chinese and Sumerians), they concluded that there is a striking similarity between the first phonetic stages of Mesopotamian cuneiform writing (invented by the Sumerians) and the first stages of the early Chinese. They created a comparative Chinese-Sumerian dictionary of many words that share common meanings and sounds, and concluded that the ancestors of the Chinese and Sumerians came from mountainous origins in Central Asia in two directions, one of which went to China and the other penetrated Iran and settled in southern Iraq. Both retained the primitive common writing of their ancestors with their common sounds.

## **3. Iranian Origin Theory: Sumerians and the Zagros Mountains**

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Some researchers have noticed that the Sumerians use a single symbol in their writing and language that signifies both the mountain and the

homeland (Kur). They believed that this indicates that they meant that their homeland is the mountain, and they put a possibility for the nearest mountains adjacent to the southern Mesopotamian Valley, the Zagros Mountains. This opinion was reinforced by the fact that the Sumerians did not build their temples on flat ground like houses and palaces, but on elevated ground. This made them associate the temple as a sacred place with the homeland as a place from which they came, and that this place is the Iranian mountains east of Sumer.

This view was further strengthened by what was found in the Sumerian cylindrical seals of drawings of trees and mountain animals such as (cypress, cedar, ibex and mountain goats with long horns). This view was further strengthened by the discovery of the similarity between Ubaid period pottery

However, the appearance of the earlier Eridu pottery, which formed their source, mitigated this argument, and then the ziggurats were the implementation of a theological-mythological depiction of the first mountain of the universe on which the gods appeared according to Sumerian theology, and that it is not possible to rely on one or two singulars to indicate the origin of a people with tens of thousands of vocabulary in their language and writing.



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pottery from Eridu 4000-B.C

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#### **4. Indian Origin Theory: Sumerians and the Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro civilisations**

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After the exciting discoveries in the Indus Basin (Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro regions) gave a new picture of the origins of ancient civilisations in India, some scholars found that there is a great similarity between Sumerian and Indian cultural and material monuments and seals dating back to about (3000 - 2700 BC). This was further reinforced by the finding in Sumerian cities such as Ur and Kish of seals bearing the characteristics of the seals known in the Indus Valley in terms of shape, style and images of carvings such as the bull with a hump on the neck, the elephant, the crane and the crocodile.

The theory of a genuine ethnic relationship between the Sumerians and the Harappa people is particularly attractive to those who try to find a linguistic link between the Sumerian language and the Dravidian language, and there is strong evidence in the form of artistic styles and material objects of a civilisation found at other sites and for trade relations in the third millennium between the Sumerians and the people of the Indian Valley or Baluchistan.



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pottery from Eridu 4000-B.C

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## 5. The theory of geographical origin: Sumerians and the Dilmun region

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From the legends of the Greek Babylonian priest Berossus and the list of pre-Flood kings and cities, there is a reference to the fish-man who came out of the water and brought with him the elements of civilisation. This is consistent with Sumerian ideas about the Sumerian god of wisdom **Enki** (Ea), who was the local deity of the city of Eridu, the oldest visible city on the banks of the Gulf.

Geoffrey Bibby's theory is based on the fact that the Sumerian artefacts and thousands of graves found in **Dilmun** (Bahrain) clearly indicate that Dilmun was the place from which the Sumerians travelled across the Persian Gulf to Failaka Island and then to southern Mesopotamia. He also relies on the fact that the Sumerians referred to Dilmun in their myths as an eternal paradise and that immortals dwelled there.

Proponents of this theory go further when they decide that the Magan civilisation in Oman, the Tarout civilisation in Arabia, and the Umm Al Nar culture in the UAE and Qatar constitute the Gulf background of the Dilmun civilisation and that these civilisations were the origin of the Sumerians and their first home before they appeared in Mesopotamia.

You might also be interested in

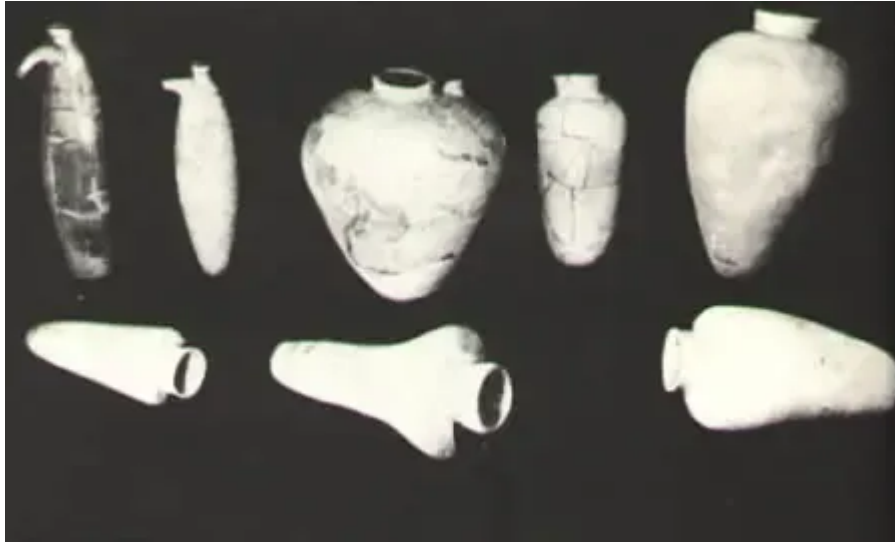
[Mesopotamia Before History: Secrets of the First Civilizations](#)

## **6. The theory of Levantine origin: Sumerians and their roots in Syria and Palestine**

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The proponents of this theory take the Sumerian Uruk pottery as proof that it has similarities in its shape and red and grey colours, which were found in northern Syria and Palestine, so they drew a sloping road from those areas that the ancestors of the Sumerians took and then settled in the Sumer region.

This argument weakens in the face of the origin of the pottery of the Ubaid and Uruk civilisation and not the other way around



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pottery vessels from Uruk 4000-B.C

## **7. Iraqi origin: Mesopotamia is the cradle of the Sumerians**

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The theory of the Iraqi origin of the Sumerians solves many of the issues raised by other theories, although some of them are still unresolved.

The first question we ask is: Which places or countries were more developed than Mesopotamia in the whole earth before the appearance of the Sumerians in southern Mesopotamia until we say that the Sumerians came from outside it and brought with them the laws of civilisation, including writing?

The answer is that there was no more developed than Mesopotamia at all, because Iraq, since the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Chalcolithic eras, has been developing in an escalating and accelerating manner and making all the places around it gasp after its development. The development of the Sumerians complemented the developments that preceded it. The Mesopotamian Valley developed in mining, agriculture, irrigation, the establishment of cities and crossings, and the emergence of crafts. What prevents these civilisational systems from growing and developing at the hands of people who were later called the Sumerians.

Historian Georges Roux says that Sumerian literature provides us with a picture of a cultured and religious people, but it does not give us information about their origin. The Sumerian stories and legends take place in an environment rich in rivers, lakes, papyrus and slender trees - a typical background of southern Iraq - and give a strong impression that the

Sumerians have always lived in this region. There is no confirmation of any earlier Sumerian homeland other than the Mesopotamian Valley.

After the massive Neolithic revolution in the north of the Rafidain Valley and on the slopes of its mountains and the emergence of villages, regular worship and ways of civilisation, this revolution reached its peak in the civilisation or culture of Samarra in the fifth millennium BC. This civilisation relied on agriculture for its economy, and agriculture in turn depended on fluctuating rainfall. The Samaritans had no choice but to rely on rivers and organise irrigation, and this had to be accompanied by the southward march of the Tigris, so they gradually began to migrate.

The ancient name of the Samarra region in the first millennium BC was (Saramrata) and was also mentioned as (Simraum) and (Saimra). This indicates that this area and its surroundings were related to the name (Sumer), as evidenced by the mention of (Sumer's wall) by a Roman historian and the existence of the region (Sumar) to the east of Samarra towards Iran. All this indicates that Neolithic Samarra was the original home of the Sumerians.

We do not rule out that the spread of the Neolithic Samaritans was in the land between Samarra on the Tigris and Haditha on the Euphrates. Their descent, each on its own river, began in the middle of the fifth millennium BC with the beginning of the chalcolithic revolution and the use of metals. The Hamrin Mountains may have been a major source of this migration. It seems that around the fifth millennium BC, a group of people known as The first inhabitants of the Tigris appeared in the areas around the Tigris River in the fertile lands of the southern Mesopotamian Valley, the children of the Samarra civilisation. Those who followed the Euphrates River in the fertile lands of the southern Mesopotamian Valley are called The first inhabitants of the Euphrates. Each of these people had a language that was somewhat different from the other, and as they merged into the cities of the sedimentary plain, what we call Ubaid emerged, who can be called the first Sumerians, as they constituted the direct ancestors of the Sumerians.

Thus, we see that the southern part of Mesopotamia was inhabited by three types of homogeneous peoples between the sixth and fifth millennia BC. They are:

### **1 - The first inhabitants of the Tigris**

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They are the people who lived around the southern half of the Tigris River and settled in the upper half of the sedimentary plain. Researchers have researched the remaining names of their language and found that there are the names of some gods such as Dagan, Zababa, the sun god AMBA, Ishtar and Adad, and that the region was inhabited by elements speaking Semitic languages with people different from the first Euphrates, they called them the first inhabitants of the Tigris).

## **2 - The first inhabitants of the Euphrates**

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They are the northern migrants who established their cities on the Euphrates River and formed the majority of the population of the lower half of southern Iraq, which included the names of well-known cities and the names of crafts and industries necessary and essential for the Sumerian agricultural community later.

Written by H. Moses

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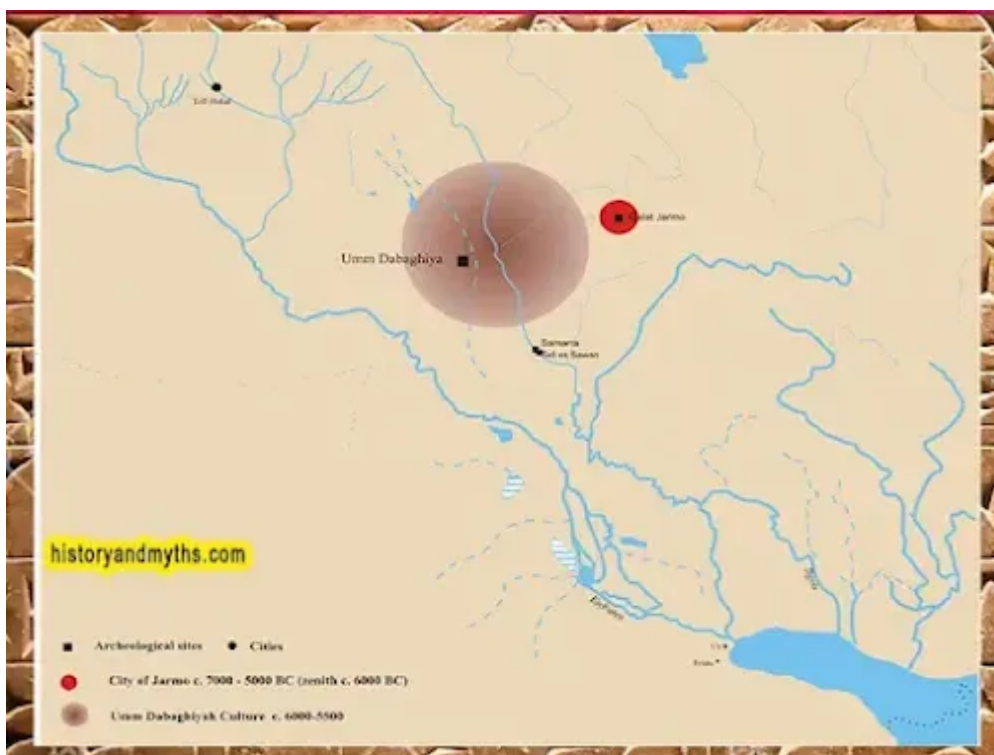
# Mesopotamia Before History: Secrets of the First Civilizations

MH [historyandmyths.com/2025/02/mesopotamia-before-history-secrets.html](https://historyandmyths.com/2025/02/mesopotamia-before-history-secrets.html)

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## Migration to Mesopotamia: The Birth of Civilization

The migration of northern Mesopotamian civilizations to the fertile valley between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers began when the land became habitable and suitable for agriculture. This transformation occurred as surface waters receded, leaving deep river channels to accommodate the flow of these great rivers from the Anatolian mountains to their confluence in the Arabian Gulf. This migration is believed to have taken place around the sixth millennium BCE.



Mesopotamia\_7000-6000 BC, Date: 1994, Source: Own work, Author: Jolle

## Early Settlements and Population Growth

The early migrants initially settled in scattered villages such as Samarra and Hassuna. However, fluctuating rainfall in the southern regions forced these settlements to expand, leading to three major migration routes from

northern to southern Mesopotamia:

### **1. Migration Along the Tigris River: The Path of the Moon Goddess**

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The Tigris River, known as "Idiglat" in ancient times, was associated with the ancient mother goddess and symbolized the moon. The migrating societies were matrilineal, tracing their heritage through the mother. The Samarra culture, known as "Soomartu," reflected this maternal lineage. The moon deity was called "En-Zu," meaning "Lord of Light" or "Eye of Light," symbolizing fertility, wisdom, and illumination.

These settlers expanded along the Tigris, transforming small villages into thriving cities. The most notable civilizations that emerged from this migration were the Amorites (Martu) and the Sumerians (Soomar). The Amorites established the Ubaid civilization (4500–3500 BCE), while the Sumerians founded the Sumerian civilization (3500–2000 BCE), with prominent cities such as Uruk, Nippur, and Ur.

### **2. Migration Along the Euphrates River: The Rise of the Sun God**

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The Euphrates River, known as "Purattu" or "Burat," symbolized the father god, who gained prominence during the patriarchal revolution in the Chalcolithic period (c. 6000 BCE). The sun, represented by "Bar" or "Par," became the symbol of life and masculine power. The sun deity was referred to as "En-Bar," meaning "Eye of the Sun" or "Eye of Life."

Migrants along the Euphrates originated from the sunlit plains and deserts of northern Mesopotamia, particularly from the region now known as Al-Jazira, west of Mosul. These people, called the "Subartu," were among the first to establish a patriarchal social structure, centering the family around the father and son.

One of their settlements was "Sipartu" (modern Sippar), located near the present-day Syrian Iraqi border, bearing the name of its people.

### **3. The Mesopotamian Plain: The Sacred Land of the Goddess Inanna**

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The fertile plain between the Tigris and Euphrates, known as "Sonartu," attracted many northern migrants due to its rich soil and habitable environment. The ancient name "Shinar" refers to this very region,

especially in its southernmost areas.

The land was associated with the virgin goddess, symbolized by the planet Venus and known as "En-Ana," meaning "Lady of the Heavens." She later became widely known as **Inanna**, the Sumerian goddess of love and beauty.

Two major peoples emerged from this region: the "Sonar" and the "Nasur." The Nasur migrated early to Eridu, the first city in history, where they built a temple dedicated to Inanna and revered the waters of the Euphrates, which they named "Eridu."



Eridu-remains

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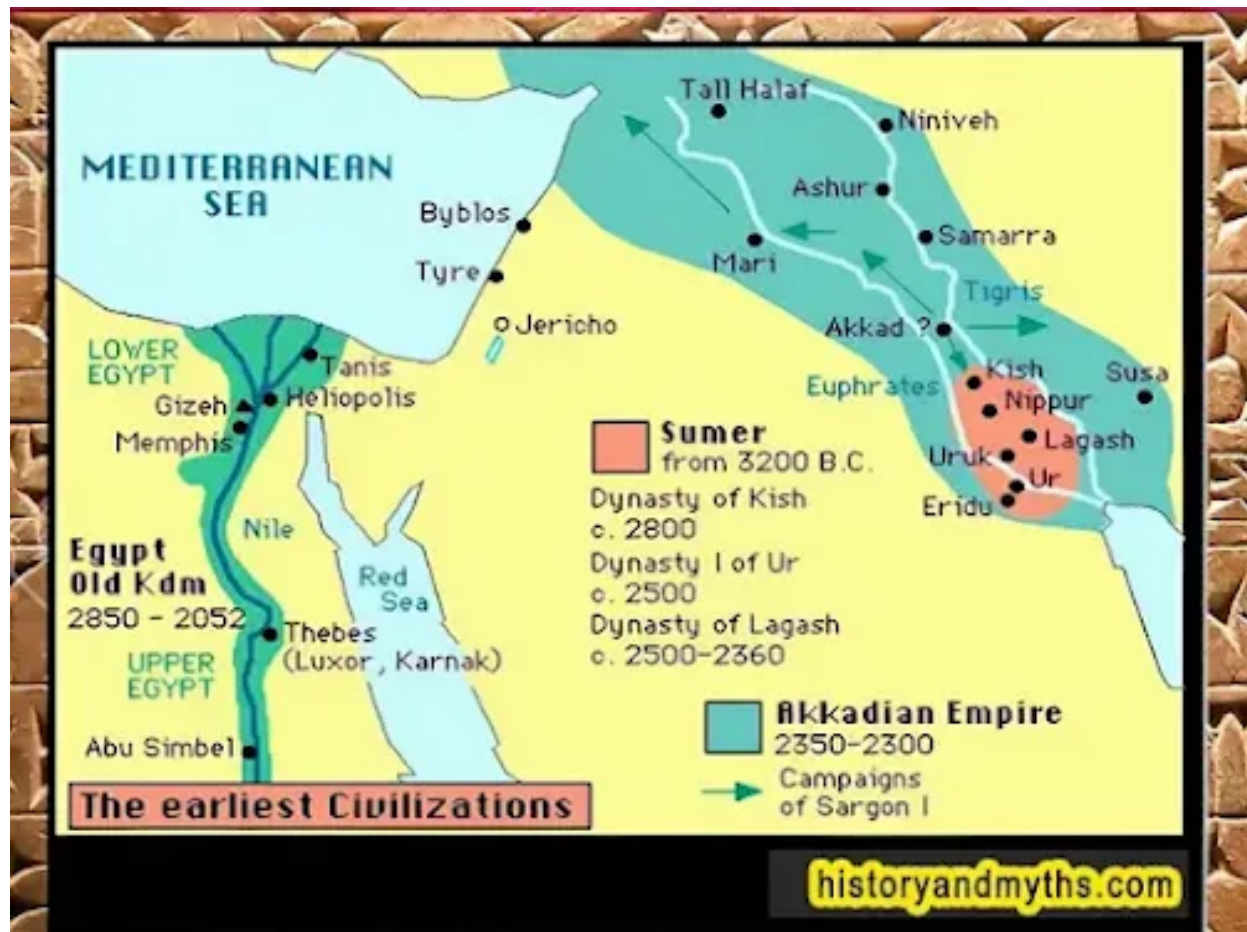
### **The Dawn of Civilization: Eridu and the Rise of Religion**

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Eridu marked the beginning of the Chalcolithic period in southern Mesopotamia, ushering in urbanization, temple construction, priestly authority, and specialized crafts. The Nasuraian, the early settlers, developed some of the world's oldest religious beliefs and myths.

However, a major challenge for them was their lack of a writing system. The Eridu civilization (5000–4500 BCE) influenced the later Ubaid civilization (4000–3500 BCE), which absorbed many of its traditions. The

Sumerian civilization (3500–2000 BCE) ultimately introduced writing around 3200 BCE, preserving Mesopotamian heritage and becoming the first recorded civilization in history.



Mesopotamia-2300

### The Matriarchal Legacy vs. The Patriarchal Shift

The migration patterns reveal that early Mesopotamian spirituality was deeply influenced by the northern matriarchal culture. Despite the patriarchal shift of the Chalcolithic period, the Tigris River and the Mesopotamian plain remained linked to the mother goddess and the virgin deity, symbolizing fertility and cosmic wisdom. Meanwhile, the Euphrates became the center of patriarchal beliefs, with the father god and his son taking precedence in religious thought.

The fertile land continued to reflect the sacred role of the mother goddess, yet celestial worship began to dominate religious ideology. The moon represented the mother goddess due to its gentle light and cyclical nature, symbolizing pregnancy and fertility. The sun, by contrast, represented the

masculine force—unchanging and powerful, with its rising and setting seen as a daily cycle of awakening and rest. Venus (Inanna) embodied the youthful, energetic daughter, appearing as the morning star at dawn and the evening star at dusk.

### **The Celestial Transformation of Fertility Myths**

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The Chalcolithic revolution elevated fertility symbols from the earth to the heavens, marking the birth of planetary deities. This transition remained influential even into the third millennium BCE during the Sumerian era. The moon goddess "Ningal" was still regarded as the great mother, giving birth to the radiant Inanna (Venus) and the ambitious Utu (the sun). However, the growing influence of patriarchal beliefs led to the masculinization of the moon deity as "Sin" or "Nannar," making him the consort of Ningal.

This celestial shift redefined fertility myths, emphasizing that life-giving forces no longer originated solely from the earth. Instead, rain from the sky became the primary source of fertility, controlled by planetary movements. The Euphrates was seen as the divine seed that impregnated the land, bringing it to life through heavenly water.

### **The Divine Seed: A New Understanding of Creation**

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The belief in celestial fertility led the Nasuraians to develop the concept of "Mana," which combined maternal (M) and paternal (N) elements. The "N" referred to "An," the male sky deity in early Mesopotamian civilizations. This shift marked the realization that male semen, rather than mere earth-bound fertility, was essential for reproduction, positioning men at the center of procreation and agricultural success.

The floodwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates were thus interpreted as the celestial seed, enriching the land and breathing life into it. Later, the Sumerians envisioned the god Enki filling these rivers with his divine semen, reinforcing the idea of heavenly fertilization:

"After Enki turned his gaze Upon all these lands, and when Enki, the provider, fixed his sight on the Euphrates, He raised his stature like a mighty bull, erected his phallus and released his semen, Filling the river with shimmering water..."



However, as patriarchal ideologies solidified, Enki was replaced by **Enlil**, the supreme god of the Sumerians. This shift reflected the political and cultural transition from Eridu to Sumer, as Enlil became the central deity of the new civilization.



city-of-Nippur-excavations-City-of-Enlil

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### **The Triumph of the Sky God and the Eclipse of the Great Mother**

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With the rise of Enlil, the god of wind and storms, Mesopotamian religion took a decisive turn toward patriarchal dominance. The goddess who once ruled over the heavens and earth was now overshadowed by the celestial father figure. Despite this transformation, traces of the Great Mother's legacy remained embedded in Mesopotamian religious thought, reminding future generations of the civilization's ancient matriarchal roots.

Written by H. Moses

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# The First Civilization: How the Sumerians Gave Us Writing

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## The emergence of pictorial writing

Read more about "[Origins of the Sumerians: Theories and History in Mesopotamia](#)"



The beginning of Sumerian writing

## The spread of Sumerian civilisation

After the first Sumerian culture of Uruk, the second Sumerian culture of Jemdet Nasr began, in which the Sumerian achievements escalated, and the arts of Sumerian civilisation progressed and most of its laws were established, and it is mentioned that a lion hunting obelisk, a votive bowl, a marble canal head, a naked woman statue, a set of flat and cylindrical seals, weapons and mosaics were found, and the metal industries developed a lot.

## The evolution of Sumerian writing to the symbolic system

Writing moved from the pictorial system to the ideographic system, where it became possible to express objects and the ideas related to them or that they can suggest, so the image of the plough can also express the farmer, the image of the mouth with the image of water expresses the verb (drink), if it is accompanied by a piece of bread expresses the verb (eat), and so on.

## **The evolution of Sumerian cuneiform writing to the phonetic system**

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The cuneiform writing then evolved to the phonetic system, where the interest in the cuneiform signs, without their meanings expressed by the image in the original, to be written by sounds. For example, the word (arrow) is drawn with a certain sign pronounced (ti), but the word (ti) means at the same time the word (life) ... Therefore, the word 'life' and 'arrow' are written with the same sign without any relationship between them.

## **The evolution of Sumerian cuneiform writing to syllabic writing**

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The fourth stage is the stage of syllabic writing (Agglutinative), which was paved by the previous stage, where the reliance became entirely on phonetic words without meanings. The combination of signs began to signify new physical and moral words, and with this stage, writing names became easy. The cuneiform script in its pictorial stage spread throughout Sumer, and it is even believed that it spread outside Sumer towards the east towards China, and from the pictorial form of Sumerian cuneiform writing emerged the ancient Chinese writing.

We also see that from the spread of the Sumerian civilisation and the Sumerians and their writing in the pictorial stage westwards towards the Mediterranean and Egypt, the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic writing emerged and many Sumerian civilisational laws spread with it.

## **The spread of cuneiform writing in Elam and neighbouring countries**

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The Sumerian cuneiform script, and with it the Sumerian language, spread to the Elam region in southern Iran, and the Elam region appeared to be an extension of the land of Sumer, separated only by the waters of the marshes. Where the late quasi-historical era appeared around 3000 BC. At this stage, Sumerian civilisation and writing began to spread towards the Arabian Gulf and reached Dilmun (Bahrain), and traces have been found indicating this.

In other words, the Sumerian radiation in the period of emergence before the beginning of the fourth millennium BC went in four important directions, influenced them and paved the way for the establishment of civilisations in them.

The widespread spread of cuneiform writing occurred with the emergence of the Akkadians and their use of cuneiform writing to record their language, which they carried with them written in cuneiform to the periphery of the Akkadian Empire, and thus the use of the cuneiform script became universal from that time on.



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Sumerian Kings List, Kish artifact

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### **The emergence of Sumerian cities**

The Sumerian emergence phase witnessed the establishment of major Sumerian cities, and the emergence of governments and sophisticated political and religious systems in these cities. The list of Sumerian kings before the Flood, which researchers speculate occurred around (3000 BC) and perhaps much earlier, tells us that eight kings ruled in the pre-Flood period that may fall within the Sumerian emergence period, where kingship descended from heaven to the Sumerian city (Eridu) and then the kingship was transferred to the five Sumerian cities in which eight kings ruled for a quarter million years (in the standards of that time of years and then the Flood occurred, and these cities and their kings are as follows:

Read more about "[The City-States of Sumer: The Age of Sumerian Dynasties.](#)"

Written by H. Moses

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# The City-States of Sumer: The Age of Sumerian Dynasties

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## Introduction

If we follow the Sumerian kings after the Flood, and what archaeological excavations have shown for this phase, we can estimate that the known date for the start of the phase of Sumerian city-states and dynasties is approximately 3000 BC. Some scholars place the start of this phase at 2800 BC or 2900 BC.

That is, this stage lasted between five or four centuries, as it approaches the time of the emergence stage, but it is distinguished from it politically, civilly and culturally in its tremendous progress and great spread, as if Sumer turned in this stage into a bright lamp that illuminated the whole earth with its science, arts, literature, religions and multiple civilizational laws that spread to its neighboring regions in all directions, not through wars or conquests, but through trade and peaceful civilizational migrations ... Sumer, the country of the first civilization, was at the same time a country of peace and security, as mass wars were not known in its era until other uncivilized peoples surprised it with the language of war and death, but Sumer was the mother of the laws of human civilization that started from southern Iraq to the whole world.





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## The City-States of Sumer: The Age of Sumerian Dynasties

### **The Emergence of Sumerian City-States**

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The Sumerian political system at this stage was characterized by the so-called city state, where each city retains its political independence, its ruler, temples and gods, although these cities are all governed by general religious beliefs and general political, social and civilizational relations. The great Sumerian city civilization emerged at this stage, which was credited with escalating the entire Sumerian civilizational achievements.

### **Major Sumerian Dynasties**

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We will mention the most important dynasties of the Sumerian cities and their most important rulers:

#### **The four dynasties of Kish**

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The first dynasty had 23 kings and the last king (Aga), who was fought by Gilgamesh, the fifth king of Uruk, and the second dynasty had 8 kings, including (Dadasek) and (Marmakkal). The third was ruled by one queen (Kubaba), and the fourth was ruled by (7) kings, the first of whom was (Puzur-Suen).





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Kug-Bau or Kubaba, Queen of Kish 2,500-2,330 B.C

### **The three dynasties of Uruk**

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The first dynasty had 12 kings, of whom the heroes of Sumer, mentioned in its well-known epics, emerged, namely (Enmerkar), (Lugalbanda) and (Gilgamesh). As for the second, the number of its kings (3), while the third was ruled by one strong and ambitious king (Lugal-zage-si), who tried to establish a unified Sumerian state for all Sumerian cities, but Sargon of Akkad eliminated him, and implemented his project by establishing an Akkadian empire that extended beyond Mesopotamia.



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Lugal-zage-si bronze bust

### **Two dynasties of Ur**

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The royal tomb in Ur was indicative of an early royal dynasty in Ur, but Ur was ruled at this stage by two dynasties, the first of which ruled (5) kings, the first of whom was Mesannepada and the last of whom was Palolo.

### **Lagash dynasty**

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Two dynasties appeared in Lagash, the first at this stage, which was devoted to urbanization and construction, and the most important its kings (Ur-Nanshe) and (Entemena) and the great reformer (Urukagina) who was the last.



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Ur-Nanshe of Lagash family

**Umma dynasty:** It was ruled by (6) kings, the first of whom was Ush.

**Akshak dynasty:** Ruled by (5) kings, the first of whom was Unzi

**Awan dynasty:** Ruled by (3) kings.

**Adab dynasty:** One king, Lugal-Anne-Mundu, ruled. **Mari Dynasty:** It was ruled by (6) kings, including Bazi.

**Hamazi Dynasty:** It was ruled by one king (Hadanish).

### **Other Significant Sumerian Cities**

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These were the main Sumerian cities in which Sumerian kings ruled, but there are other cities in Sumer that have the same importance as these cities, such as Nippur, which is the largest Sumerian religious city and is almost the sacred religious capital of the entire country of Sumer, where the largest god of Sumer (**Enlil**) was worshiped, the city of Arido on the Gulf coast, the city of Sippar where the sun god **Utu** was worshiped, Eshnunna, Isin and other cities. All these cities did not have kings and royal dynasties, but they were no less important than the cities of the ruling dynasties. This cultural stage is characterized by the innovation of the

political civil state system after the cities appeared in the Mesopotamian Valley since the fifth millennium BC, a system that indicates urbanization and urbanization and the first form of civilized governance in the history of the world, which remained the best political rule for long ages, as the Levant, for example, remained throughout its ancient history under this system and no centralized state appeared in the Levant, but this did not prevent the emergence of diverse and renewed civilizations in the Levantine cities in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan.

More than 2,500 years after the emergence of the Sumerian system, the Greeks established a similar system, which was the basis of Greek civilization. On the contrary, as we will see in Sumerian, the destruction of this system and the trend towards a single centralized state system and then a vast empire dispelled much of the possibility of the emergence of new diverse achievements, as this centralization eliminated the diversity that abounded in the city-states.

### **The Sumerian Political System**

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The tribal and clan system in Sumer completely receded and was replaced in the Sumerian city by the parliamentary system. Kremer says that the first known political parliament in recorded human history was convened in a serious session around 3000 BC. AD. It was like our parliament, consisting of two chambers: The Council of Elders, or the Senate, and the House of Commons (deputies), composed of male citizens capable of bearing arms, and it was a parliament of war, called to convene to make a decision on a serious matter concerning war and peace.

The city-state consisted of the capital, which is the central city followed by small cities, villages and agricultural lands, and the southern Mesopotamian Valley was crowded with these cities and their annexes, architecture and specialized quality life, and most of the Sumerian cities had walls surrounding them.

### **Religious Life in Sumerian Cities**

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As for the religious life of these cities, the Sumerian religion was the first profound religious system that began with the historical ages of man, as prehistoric religions lacked a precisely formed and uniformly rhythmic systematic network in doctrine, rituals and mythology, and the emergence of the Sumerian religion was a profound spiritual revolution in its time

because it was a comprehensive religious system, and then it implicitly contained most of the seeds and roots of the religions that appeared after it in the historical stages of man.

**Also read: School Life in Sumerian Civilization: Lessons from the Ancient Past**

### **Conclusion**

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The greatest influence exerted by the Sumerian civilization in the Rafidain Valley itself, especially on the Semitic peoples who began to enter Iraq during the fourth and third millennia BC, which had a friendly relationship with the Sumerians and were considered part of the population of Mesopotamia, not a stranger to it ... Even if they absorbed this Sumerian heritage and the number of these peoples was increasing compared to the Sumerians, they jumped to the stage of political rule of ancient Iraq, which is what the Akkadians (Semites) did.

Written by H. Moses

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# Sumerian Empire: Lugal-Zage-Si to the Third Dynasty of Ur

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MH [historyandmyths.com/2025/01/sumerian-empire-lugal-zagesi-ur.html](https://historyandmyths.com/2025/01/sumerian-empire-lugal-zagesi-ur.html)

April 20, 2025

## **The Rise of Sumerian City-States and Early Conflicts**

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The era of the Sumerian city-states was an era of civilization, construction, and political peace, but the latter part of it witnessed political tension that began between two rival dynasties in Lagash and Umma.

## **The Reign and Conquests of Lugal-zage-si**

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It began first between them over irrigation water, agricultural land and defining borders, and concluded between them with the emergence of the powerful Umma king Lugal-zage-si, who eliminated the Lagash dynasty in the time of its last king Urukagina (whose name is now read Uru-inim-gina), a great social reformer and we consider him the first legislator in Sumer, but the political intransigence adopted by Lugal-zage-si made him rush towards the cities He rushed towards the other Sumerian cities and ruled Uruk, and then the Sumerian cities fell into his hands one after another, until he called himself (King of Sumer) and thus established a single Sumerian kingdom or state, which is the first of its kind in history.





ancient sumerian cities

### Impact of Centralized Control on Sumer

If we want to pause for a moment on this serious event, we can objectively say that the emergence of a single Sumerian state was a prelude to the demise of all of Sumer. Because Sumer invented a great political system (city-states), and its governance was based on political decentralization, a kind of confederation that was suitable for the life of that time ... This system did not hinder the existence of a Sumerian entity and a great Sumerian civilization, but the use of force and centralized control was one of the precedents that will be repeated in a way that history will witness the demise of Sumer itself, as the rule of the Lugal-zage-si. The rule of the unified Sumerian state of Lugal-zage-si lasted between (25-29) years, and there is something said about this Lugal-zage-si that he expanded his state and turned it into an empire that extended beyond the borders of the

Mesopotamian Valley and included Syria, and this is what we see recorded in a stone piece dedicated to Enlil in Nippur about the conquests of Lugal-zage-si:

(When Enlil, the king of all sovereign countries, granted him kingship over the homeland (Sumer), drew the attention of the nation to him, made all countries wait for him, and made everyone, from wherever the sun rises to wherever the sun sets, surrender to him. After this, he joined the feet of everyone from the lower sea (the Arabian Gulf), along the Tigris and Euphrates, to the upper sea (the Mediterranean Sea), Enlil left him no rival from wherever the sun rises to wherever it sets. All the sovereign countries submitted to his control (like cows) in the pastures and the nation watered (its fields) happily under his rule, and all the subordinate rulers of Sumer and all the lords of independent countries bowed before his arbitration library in Uruk).

Although there are indications of the appearance of Sumerian cultural influences in these areas since the previous stage, we cannot be politically certain of the emergence of a Sumerian empire in the era of Lugal-zage-Si, although we can fully confirm the emergence of a unified Sumerian state or kingdom in his era, which included the south and north of the Rafidain Valley and lasted a little more than a quarter of a century.

### **The Emergence and Expansion of the Akkadian Empire**

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It seems that this period of the emergence of the sprawling Sumerian state aroused the lust of a non-Sumerian man who lived in this Sumerian state, who is of Semitic origin, who worked as a bearer (cup) or waiter for the Sumerian king of Kish (Ur-Zababa). He began to plan to make a united Iraqi political state as Lugal-zage-si did and more, and this was helped by the increase in the Semitic element at the expense of the Sumerian and the dense presence of them in the Sumerian cities, that man is (Sargon of Akkad) who overthrew Lugal-zage-si and founded the state and then the Akkadian empire with its capital Akkad, which lasted about a century and a half, during which it expanded and included neighboring countries and became the first empire in history, and we believe that the obsession with expansion and control that Lugal-zage-si started led to this result, which we believe destroyed the diversity and possibilities for the growth of

important local civilizations and revived the obsession with expansion, conquest, cruelty to countries and their peoples and possibly destruction, which is what will characterize the history of the ancient Near East.



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Empire of Sargon

### **Cultural Integration and the Peaceful Transition of Power**

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The transfer of power from the Sumerians to the Akkadians was peaceful because of the historical relationship that binds the two peoples and causes Sumer to embrace them for many centuries and reduce the possibilities of destruction between them, and among the civilizational matters that should be noted on the subject of the transfer of political power to the Akkadian Semites is the absence of the national conflict that was assumed by ancient researchers between the Semites and the Sumerians as originating from national reasons. The fact is that the Akkadian kings, if they took cruelty towards some Sumerian cities, the reason for this was because they declared revolt, not because their people were Sumerians, and they followed the same policy towards some Akkadian cities if they showed disobedience. As for the Sumerian culture, it did not end or dissolve during the two Akkadian centuries, but gained new active elements from the Akkadians, just as it was given the raw land on which the Akkadian civilization and culture built itself ... Even on the political level, some Sumerian city rulers of Sumerian origin remained

governing their cities, and without this matter, the Sumerians would not have been able after Gutian overthrew the Akkadian Empire to expel Gutian and restore the entire Mesopotamian Valley.

### **The Decline of the Akkadian Empire and the Gutian Rule**

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The Akkadian state was ruled by ten kings, of whom the first five were famous, then the Gutians, who are from the Zagros Mountains adjacent to Iraq's eastern border with Iran, were able to eliminate the Akkadian state and inherit most of its cities, especially the northern ones, and ruled for 125 years, during which they did not provide any culture or civilization to Iraq.

### **The Revival of Sumerian City-States and the Third Ur Dynasty**

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first of their kings (Sarlagab) and for a short time in southern Iraq until they withdrew to the north and took the city of (Arabkha) (Kirkuk) as their center, so that such an atmosphere paved the return of the Sumerian city-states to develop and revive, and a dynasty appeared in Uruk ruled by five kings. The second Lagash dynasty emerged, which revitalized the Sumerian spirit, especially during the era of its kings, Gudea. Then the founder of the fifth dynasty appeared in Uruk, Utu-hengal, who was strong and expelled Gutian from the entire Mesopotamian Valley and restored Sumerian sovereignty over the country, and it seems that he made an attempt to settle from the cities of Lagash and Ur that belonged to him, but the ruler of Ur, whose name is (Ur-Nammu), separated from him, then overcame him and established a new Sumerian dynasty, the third Ur dynasty, which was destined to restore Sumerian glory and make Sumer a new empire.



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Gudea and Ur-Nammu

### **The Era of the Sumerian Empire – The Third Dynasty of Ur**

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The rule of the Third Dynasty of Ur lasted almost one century, in which it was not satisfied with unifying the Sumerian cities, but was able to extend the influence of Sumer beyond the Mesopotamian Valley, imitating what the Akkadian Empire did, as its conquests included most of the Near East, in addition to North Mesopotamia, its conquests reached Elam, Syria, the eastern regions of Asia Minor and the Arabian Gulf regions.

The third dynasty of Ur was ruled by five kings, Ur-Nammu, Shulgi, Amar-Sin, Shu-Sin and Ibbi-Sin.

During this last Sumerian century, the Sumerians achieved their greatest achievements in all fields and established the pillars of a great civilization that would be the basis for what came after it, as the ancient Sumerian culture revived as a result of the Akkadian legacy that added much to it and thus a new Sumerian culture arose, which became more capable of giving the ancient world that began to rise and establish its states and civilizations.



The Sumerian king Ur-Nammu was the most famous and great king of the Ur dynasty, he was interested in building and urbanization in all of Sumer, and the Ur ziggurat built for the moon god (nanna) is considered one of his most famous and magnificent architectural metaphors. He is also considered one of the oldest legislators in history, as his law, written in the Sumerian language, which reflects his human sense of justice and his enactment of the laws of financial fines instead of physical retribution (an eye for an eye), which was later enacted by Hammurabi.



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King Ur-Nammu stands before Nannar

### **Reasons for the Fall of the Sumerian Empire**

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It is believed that the deep reason for the fall of the Sumerian Empire is an economic reason, as it became difficult for a country whose fertile land began to rise in salinity and its agricultural production decreased, to provide food and a quiet life to its distant regions ... and to pay attention to its proper administration.



As for the political and military reasons, they were direct and violent, as it was clear that the heart of Sumer in southern Iraq became between two fierce jaws, the first came from the east, where the Elamites attacked the Sumerian cities and destroyed them, and the second came from the west, where the Amorites (who are new Semites) attacked Sumer and seized the rule in their cities, then they were able to expel the Elamites from Mesopotamia and became the kings of the new dynasties and kingdoms, then one of the Amorite dynasties united Iraq, the first Babylonian dynasty.

Thus, the political entity of the Sumerians disappeared forever, but their cultural presence was the foundation on which all the civilizations of ancient Iraq were built, and the Sumerian language continued to be used as a language of religion and science for later periods.

The Sumerian Empire in the late reign of its emperors had begun to disintegrate, as Elam separated from it, then the Syrian cities separated, while the cities of Mesopotamia were formed like scattered pieces of large and small kingdoms, in the south of the Mesopotamian Valley, a sharp struggle emerged between the kingdoms of ISIN and LARSA to occupy the center of Ur and rule the country of Sumer and Akkad. In the north of the Rafidain Valley, an intense struggle emerged between the kingdoms of Eshnunna and Assyria to control the major trade routes, and Iraq gradually disintegrated into new Semitic city-states this time until the emergence of the first Babylonian dynasty, which reunited it under a strong Semitic rule.

### **Conclusion**

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The Sumerian history shows us a gradual development, from the distant agricultural origins of the northern Iraqi peasantry to the emergence of clear leaders and priesthoods in the middle of the fourth millennium BC to the emergence of Sumerian city states to the emergence of a single Sumerian state to the emergence of the Sumerian Empire, a history that deserves reflection and re-examination always because it is the first written history in the world of the first civilization that graduated politically from the council government to the city to the state to the empire.

Written by H. Moses

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# School Life in Sumerian Civilization: Lessons from the Ancient Past

MH [historyandmyths.com/2025/01/school-life-in-sumerian-civilization.html](https://historyandmyths.com/2025/01/school-life-in-sumerian-civilization.html)

April 20, 2025

## The Invention of Cuneiform Writing and the Birth of Sumerian Schools

The Sumerian schools were the direct corollary of the invention and development of the cuneiform writing system, Sumer's most important contribution to civilization. The first written documents were found in a Sumerian city called Uruk. These documents consist of more than a thousand small clay tablets containing primarily fragments of economic and administrative memoirs written on them. But among them are several tablets containing word lists designed for study and training. This means that as early as 3000 BC, some scribes were already thinking about education and learning. Progress was slow in the following centuries. But by the middle of the third millennium, there must have been a number of schools throughout Sumer where writing was taught systematically.

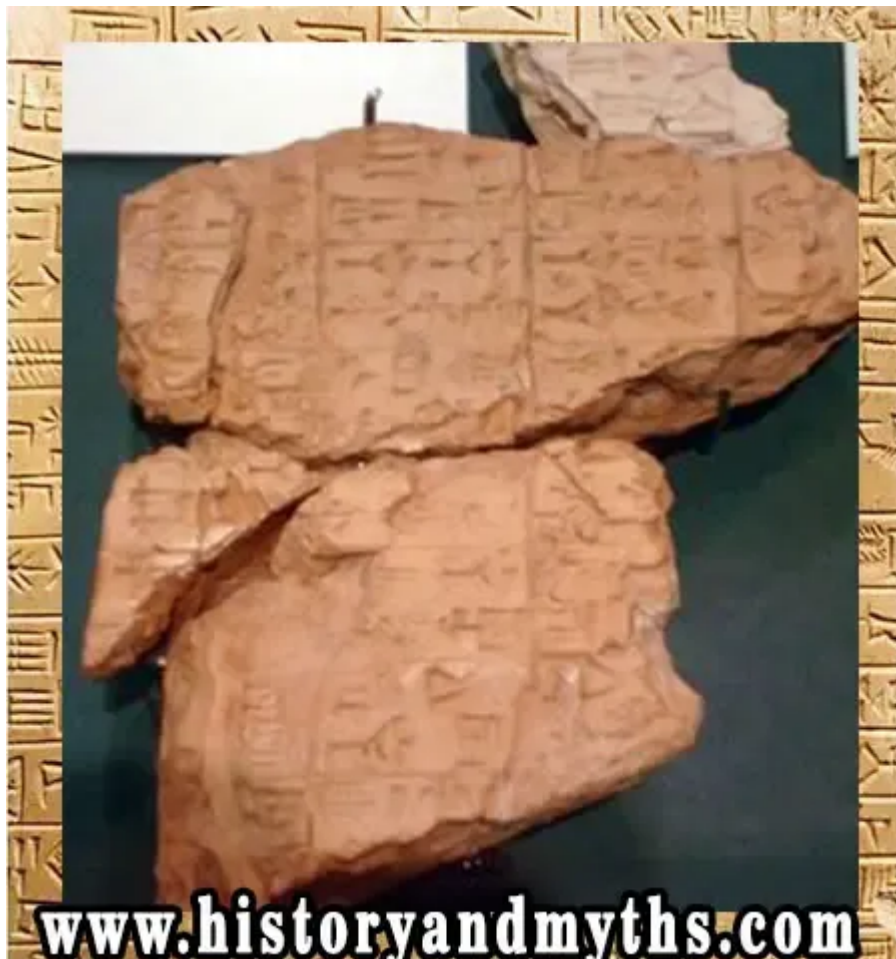


School Life in Sumerian Civilization

## The Role of Sumerian Schools in Administrative and Economic Development

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In the ancient city of Shurupak, the birthplace of the Sumerian “Noah,” a large number of “textbooks” dating back to around 2500 BC have been discovered. However, the Sumerian school system did not mature and spread until the latter half of the third millennium. The vast majority of these books were administrative in nature, covering every stage of Sumerian economic life. We learn from them that the number of scribes who practiced their profession during those years was in the thousands. There were junior and “senior” scribes, royal and temple scribes, scribes who specialized in certain categories of administrative activities, and scribes who became senior government officials. All these reasons lead us to assume that many scribal schools of great size and importance flourished throughout the country.



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Shuruppak-tablet

### **Daily Life of Students in Sumerian Schools**

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Hundreds of practice boards have been discovered, filled with all sorts of exercises prepared by the students themselves as part of their daily

homework. The texts discovered range from the scribbled scratches of a first grader to the neatly written marks of an advanced student about to become a “graduate.” These ancient “notebooks” tell us a lot about the way the Sumerian school taught and the nature of its curriculum. These ancient “notebooks” tell us a lot about the Sumerian school's teaching method and the nature of its curriculum. Ancient Sumerian teachers themselves liked to write about school life, and many of their writings on the subject have been found, at least in part. From all these sources we get a picture of the Sumerian school - its aims and objectives, its students and teaching staff, its curricula and teaching methods. This is unique for an early period of human history.

### **The Sumerian School Curriculum and its Cultural Significance**

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The primary purpose of the Sumerian school was to train the scribes required to fulfill the economic and administrative requirements of the land, especially those of the temple and palace. This remained the main objective of the Sumerian school throughout its existence. However, in the course of its growth and development, and especially as a result of its ever-expanding curriculum, the school became the center of culture and learning in Sumer. Within its walls flourished the learned scholar, the man who studied all the theological, botanical, zoological, mineralogical, geographical, mathematical, grammatical, and linguistic knowledge of his time.



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balance-sheet-tablet

### **Creative and Literary Education in Sumerian Schools**

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Moreover, unlike today's educational institutions, the Sumerian school was also a center for what could be called creative writing. The literary creations of the past were studied and copied, and new books were also composed here. While most Sumerian school graduates became clerks in the service of the temple and palace, there were also those among the country's rich and powerful who devoted their lives to teaching and learning.

Like university professors today, many of these ancient scholars relied on teaching salaries to make a living, and in their spare time they spent their time researching and writing.

### **Sumerian Schools: Centers of Knowledge and Culture**

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The Sumerian school, which may have begun as an annex to the temple, over time became a secular institution, and its curriculum also became largely secular in nature. Teachers were paid, apparently, from tuition fees collected from students.

Education was neither public nor compulsory. Most students belonged to wealthy families; the poor could barely afford the cost and time required for prolonged education. There is not a single woman listed as a scribe in these documents, so it is likely that the student body of the Sumerian school was composed of males only.

### **Teachers and Students: Relationships and Methods in Sumerian Schools**

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The head of the Sumerian school was the “expert” or “teacher” and was also called the “father of the school” while the pupil was called the “son of the school”. The assistant teacher was known as the “elder brother”. Some of his duties included writing new tablets for the pupils to copy, reviewing the copies made by the pupils, and listening to them recite their lessons from memory. Other faculty members included the “man in charge of painting” and the “man in charge of Sumerian”. There were also observers responsible for attendance and the “man with the whip,” who was most likely responsible for discipline. We know nothing about the rank of the school's staff, except that the headmaster was the “father of the school”. We know nothing about their sources of income. Perhaps they were paid by the “school father” from the tuition fees he received.

### **Disciplinary Methods and Their Impact on Sumerian Education**

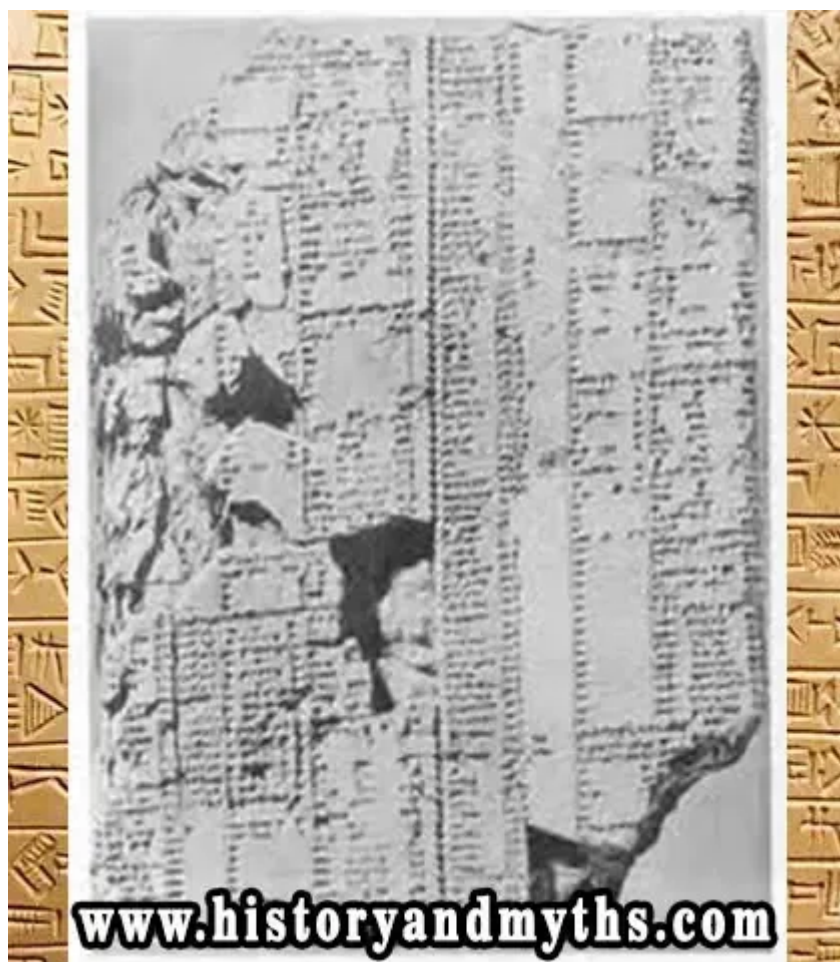
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Regarding the Sumerian school approach, we have an abundance of data from the schools themselves, which is actually a unique case in early human history. In this case, we do not need to rely on statements made by the ancients or infer from scattered fragments of information. Rather, we have the written productions created by the schoolchildren themselves, from the first attempts of beginners to the copies of advanced students whose work is so well prepared that it is difficult to distinguish it from the work of the teacher himself. From these school products we realize that the Sumerian school curriculum consisted of two main groups: The first can be characterized as semi-scientific and academic, and the second as literary and creative.

When examining the first, or semi-scientific, group, it is important to



emphasize that the topics did not emerge from what we might call a scholarly motivation. These books were not originally textbooks, but arose and evolved from the school's main purpose, which was to teach the scribe how to write Sumerian. To fulfill this pedagogical need, Sumerian writing teachers devised an educational system based primarily on linguistic categorization - that is, they classified the Sumerian language into groups of related words and phrases and had students memorize and copy them so that they could easily rewrite them. In the third millennium BCE, these “textbooks” became increasingly more complete, and gradually grew until they were standardized for all Sumerian schools. Among them we find long lists of the names of trees and reeds; all kinds of animals, including insects and birds; towns, cities and villages; stones and minerals. These compilations reveal a considerable knowledge of what might be called the botanical, zoological, geographical and mineralogical heritage.



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Schooling-Grammatical-Text-of-Nippur

Sumerian school students also created various mathematical tables and many detailed mathematical problems with their solutions.



Schooling-mathematical-text-with-geometric-design

In the field of linguistics, the study of Sumerian grammar was well represented among the school tablets. A number of them are inscribed with long lists of thematic complexes and verbal formulas, demonstrating a highly developed grammatical approach.

Moreover, as a result of the gradual invasion of the Sumerians by the Semitic Akkadians in the last quarter of the third millennium BCE, the Sumerians prepared the oldest “dictionaries” known to man. The Semitic invaders not only borrowed the Sumerian text, but also borrowed Sumerian literary works, which they studied and imitated long after Sumerian had died out as a spoken language. Hence the educational need for “dictionaries” in which Sumerian words and phrases were translated into Akkadian.

The literary and creative aspects of the Sumerian approach were based primarily on the study, copying, and imitation of a great variety of literary compositions that must have originated and developed mainly in the latter half of the third millennium BC. These ancient works, numbering in the

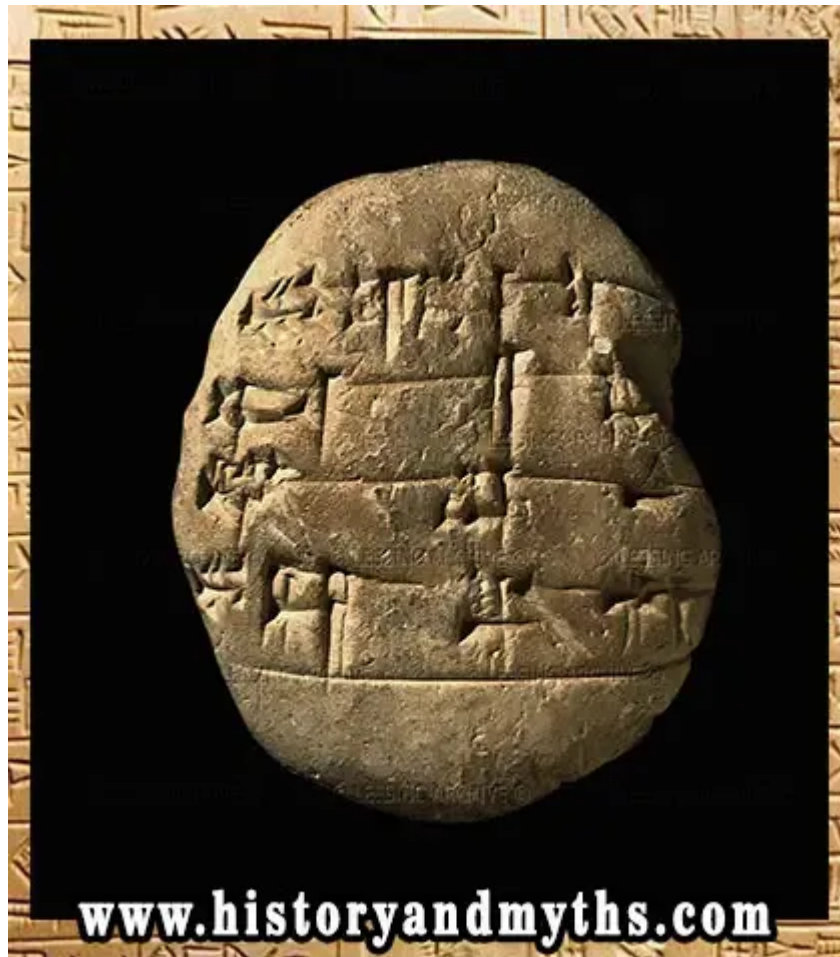
hundreds, were almost all poetic in form, ranging in length from less than fifty verses to nearly a thousand. Those that have been found so far are mainly of the following types: Epic myths and stories in the form of narrative poems celebrating the deeds and exploits of Sumerian gods and heroes; hymns to gods and kings.

Little is known so far about the teaching methods and techniques practiced in the Sumerian school in the morning, upon arriving at school, it is clear that the pupil has studied the tablet prepared the day before.

The “big brother” - the assistant teacher - has prepared a new tablet, and the student begins to copy it and studies it.

when it comes to discipline. While teachers encouraged their students, through praise, to do well, they relied primarily on the cane to correct students' mistakes and shortcomings.

A student's life was not simple. He went to school every day from sunrise to sunset. He must have had some vacations during the school year, but we don't have any information about that. He spent many years in his studies and stayed in school from his early youth until the day he became a young man.



Board-with-homework

### **Architectural Discoveries of Sumerian Educational Buildings**

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What was an ancient Sumerian school like? In several excavations in Mesopotamia, buildings have been discovered that for one reason or another have been identified as possible schools - one at Nippur, another at Sippar, and a third at Ur. However, except for the fact that a large number of slabs were found in the rooms, there was nothing to distinguish them from the rooms of ordinary houses. However, while digging in ancient Mari west of Nippur, the French discovered two rooms that certainly seem to have the physical features that would be characteristic of a school room, especially since they contain several rows of benches made of burnt bricks with seating for one, two, or four people.





Sumerian-school

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### **Sumerian Students' Perception of Their Educational System**

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How did the students themselves feel about this educational system? For at least a partial answer, we turn to a true Sumerian account of school life that took place and was written nearly four thousand years ago but was collected and translated in modern times. It is particularly instructive regarding the relationship between pupil and teacher, and offers the unique “first” experience in the history of education

One of the most interesting human documents excavated in the Near East is a Sumerian essay on the daily activities of a pupil. Written by an unknown teacher who lived around 2000 BC, its simple and direct words reveal how little human nature has changed over the millennia. In this ancient essay, a Sumerian schoolboy is afraid to be late for school “for fear that his teacher will beat him with a stick.” When he wakes up, he urges his mother to hurry up and make him lunch. At school, whenever he misbehaves, his teacher and assistants cane him. As for the teacher, his salary seems to have been meager at the time

This article, no doubt authored by one of the “masters” at the House of Tablets, begins with a direct question to the disciple: “Disciple, where have

you been since the early days?" The disciple answers, "I went to school." The author then asks, "What did you do at school?" Then comes the pupil's answer, which takes up more than half of the document, saying in part, "I read my painting, ate my lunch, prepared my (new) painting, wrote it, finished it, then they gave me my oral work, and in the afternoon, they gave me my written work. When school was over, I went home, entered the house, and found my father sitting there. I told my father about my written work. Then I read my board to him, and my father was pleased. When I woke up early in the morning, I faced my mom and said, "Give me my lunch, I want to go to school." My mom gave me two rolls and I went; my mom gave me two rolls and I went to school. At school, the supervisor said to me: "Why are you late?" Frightened and with my heart pounding, I walked in front of my teacher and bowed respectfully

But whether he bowed or not, it seems to have been a bad day for this student. He had to receive beatings from various faculty members at the school for inappropriate behaviors such as talking, standing up, and walking out of the gate. Worst of all, the teacher told him, "Your hand (dirty) is unsatisfactory," and hit him with the cane. Apparently, this was too much for the boy, so he suggested to his father to invite the teacher home to calm him down with some gifts. The composition continues: "His father listened to what the student said. The teacher was brought from the school, and after entering the house, he sat in the seat of honor. The disciple took care of him and served him, and all that he had learned of the art of writing on tablets he revealed to his father."

The father then invited the teacher, drank wine and dined, "dressed him in a new robe, gave him a gift, and put a ring on his hand." Motivated by this generosity, the teacher reassured the aspiring writer with poetic words that read in part, "Young man, because you have not neglected my word, nor forsaken it, I wish you to reach the pinnacle of the art of writing, I wish you to reach it fully. "Let your brothers be their leader, let your friends be their leader, and let your rank be higher than that of the schoolboys. You have done well in school ... and you have become a learned man.

## **Related Articles**

- [Origins of the Sumerians: Theories and History in Mesopotamia](#)
- [The City-States of Sumer: The Age of Sumerian Dynasties](#)
- [The First Civilization: How the Sumerians Gave Us Writing](#)
- [Sumerian Empire: Lugal-Zage-Si to the Third Dynasty of Ur](#)



Written by H. Moses

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# Marriage and Divorce in Ancient Sumerian Civilization

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MH [historyandmyths.com/2024/12/marriage-divorce-ancient-sumerian.html](https://historyandmyths.com/2024/12/marriage-divorce-ancient-sumerian.html)

April 21, 2025

## The Woman in Sumerian and Akkadian Society

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In Sumerian, a teenage girl before marriage was called "ki-sikil-tur," and in Akkadian, she was known as "bētultu," meaning "virgin" or "maiden." An adult girl was referred to as "ki-sikil."

The Sumerians used the term "namdam-ši" for marriage, and in Akkadian, it was "akāzu," meaning "to take." Although the Sumerians encouraged early marriage, it was not favored to marry very young girls.

## Marriage Procedures in Sumerian Society

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Marriage procedures began with obtaining the consent of the girl's father and mother, especially when the groom was a youth, marked by the appearance of facial hair.



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Marriage and Divorce in Ancient Sumerian Civilization

In the later Sumerian period, the groom's father would swear an oath in the name of the king before priests and witnesses, saying, "May my son and rightful heir marry so-and-so, daughter of so-and-so." The ceremonies were conducted by a religious priest.

The approval of both parents was essential, followed by a verbal agreement and a feast. The woman would then become a lawful wife, with this formalized by the payment of the bride price and gifts, referred to as "nig-de-a" by the Sumerians.

These included foodstuffs such as grains, meat, butter, dates, and fruit, delivered to the bride's house in dishes.

### **The Marriage Contract in Sumerian Society**

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The formal marriage contract, known in Sumerian as "ka.kesda," was crucial and marriage could not proceed without it.

It was often written by the groom and kept by the bride to ensure the rights of any legitimate children, recorded on a small clay tablet.

A model of written contracts in Sumerian from the reign of King Samsu-iluna (1749–1712 BCE) indicates that the bride paid the bride price, which she could reclaim along with the dowry if divorced by her husband.

Conversely, if she initiated the divorce, she lost the bride price and had to pay the dowry to her husband.

### **Types of Marriage in Sumerian Society**

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There is an unconfirmed tradition from the time of Urukagina (24th century BCE) suggesting that women could marry more than one man simultaneously, but Urukagina prohibited this and mandated monogamy. It appears that marriage was performed by a priest who poured oil on the heads of the bride and groom, who then paid a specified amount to the priest.

If you want more details about religious practices in Sumerian society, you can read the following article.

#### **Sumerian Religious Practices in Mesopotamia**

There were detailed rules regarding marriage to a deceased brother's widow, stepmothers, acquiring concubines, adoption, inheritance, and various forms of marriage including marriage by cohabitation, purchase, and unilateral marriage.

### **Divorce in Sumerian Society**

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Divorce was known since the Early Dynastic period and involved the relinquishment of rights by either the husband or wife upon separation. Urukagina's reforms mentioned that before his time, a man wishing to divorce his wife had to pay five shekels of silver to the governor and one shekel to the chief minister, implying that the man needed the approval of authorities before divorcing.

A wife could divorce her husband in rare and specific cases, and divorce was called "tag" in Sumerian.

Sumerian laws did not prevent a husband from divorcing a wife who had children, but they placed certain conditions to balance his will with his responsibility to ensure the support of his ex-wife and children.

For example, a provision in the Law of Eshnunna stated that if a man divorced his wife after having children and took a second wife, he would be expelled from his home and sever all ties with his property.

On the other hand, divorce from a barren wife was relatively easy and acceptable.

A wife could divorce her husband if she could prove his misconduct and involvement in forbidden acts.

A Sumerian text illustrates this: after the husband had given the marriage gifts and performed the marriage rites (pouring oil), the wife filed a complaint with the city priests accusing her husband of engaging in homosexual acts.

After she proved to the judges that she had seen her husband with another man, the judges, on behalf of the king, shaved the husband's head, pierced his nose, and paraded him in disgrace. The wife received her dowry from the husband's possessions and left him.

**You may also like:** [Sumerian Festivals – Rituals from Ancient Mesopotamia](#)

**For those who prefer visual content, you can watch the video below that covers the same topic in detail.**

**[Marriage and Divorce in Ancient Sumerian history](#)**

Written by H. Moses

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# Sumerian Religious Practices in Mesopotamia

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The Sumerians were a deeply religious people, showing profound reverence for the gods and a strong sense of morality.

Their daily religious rituals were a testament to their piety, not only to the gods and priests but also to themselves.

The daily rituals were not just those performed every day but included traditional and common religious ceremonies.



Sumerian Religious Practices in Mesopotamia

## Ablution and Bathing

Ablution was a necessary ritual for the Sumerians, not only for prayer but for any religious activity. It was accompanied by various religious utterances.

Ablution seemed to be limited to washing the hands, using a ceremonial basin called (Abzu) found in most Sumerian temples, such as in Eridu and Lagash.

The basin was connected to running water channels outside the temple.

It is believed that ablution was a religious practice to draw near to the god Enki, the god of water, wisdom, and creator of humans.

Touching his water to the human body was considered a purification and re-creation of the body.



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ceremonial basin Lagash

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## Prayer

There is no evidence that Sumerian prayers were performed daily and at specific times.

Sumerian prayers seemed to be extemporaneous supplications directed to a specific god, recited in temples, homes, palaces, or elsewhere.

Prayers (Prayers) differ from hymns (Hymns) as they are pleas to the god and are not accompanied by music, while hymns are praises to the god often performed with musical instruments.

Prayers could be conducted with a priest or alone by the worshiper in front of a god's statue.

Prayers were often accompanied by specific rituals and gestures indicating the worshiper's reverence and the offerings they presented, varying according to time and place.

The content of the prayers included priestly words and offered a mythological experience to the worshiper, focusing on requests and thanksgiving.





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Ninhursag and mixed-breed high-priest service worker

## Fasting

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Religious abstention from certain types of food was a form of fasting practiced by the Sumerians.

Priests, possibly for economic reasons, would recommend abstaining from certain meats, fruits, or vegetables for a specified time, framed with religious or mythological justifications.

## Hymns

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Hymns were ritualistic, often performed with musical accompaniment. The Sumerians called hymns "Shir." Hymns varied in length, some not religious, particularly those dedicated to kings.

Hymns differed from prayers and spells as they were spiritual songs reflecting on the god's qualities and invoking blessings, whereas prayers were specific requests for health, success, or justice. Spells were ritual texts to expel demons by invoking the god and good spirits.

Sumerian hymns were divided into priestly and royal hymns. Priestly hymns glorified the great Sumerian gods, while royal hymns praised kings and their deeds, often including praise for a specific god.

Hymns were performed with known melodies and musical rhythms, with

instruments like drums, tambourines, and lyres, often accompanied by temple dancers.

For more about Sumerian hymns and festivals

Sumerian Festivals Rituals from Ancient Mesopotamia



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ancient musicians

## **Purification**

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Purification involved burning incense, pouring liquids like water and oil, burning and burying objects, washing, and making sacrifices.

Purification was based on the belief that humans and places were surrounded by evil spirits.

To connect with the sacred, materials symbolizing the gods were used for purification. Water and oil represented the god Enki, fire represented the god Nusku, and libations and sacrifices represented the god Shul-shaka, son of the god Ninkursu.

Burial referred to the god Dumuzi, and burning symbolized the god Utu's connection to fire and the underworld.

## **Incense Burning**

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Daily incense burning was a ritual performed in temples by purified priests and other priests like the exorcist (Ashipu), who used incense, particularly harmal, believed to expel evil spirits by filling the space and driving them out through doors and windows.

Temples had high altars for incense, with a place resembling a stove where incense was burned daily or during other rituals. Special incense containers were held by priests during exorcism rituals.

## **Pouring Liquids**

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Besides incense, pouring liquids like water and oil was a method of purification and expelling spirits.

Oil was specifically poured on the bride's head during weddings, possibly accompanied by washing, mentioned in the reforms of Urukagina.

Pouring oil and anointing were also done during the king's coronation, using a special vessel for sacred water.

### **Ritual of Opening and Washing the God's Mouth**

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This ritual bestowed life upon new statues of gods. It involved placing jars of sacred water, red and white cloths beside the statue, offering sacrifices, washing the statue's mouth with specific herbs, cedar sticks, cloth, salt, cedar resin, fats, precious stones, butter, and syrup, and reciting ritual phrases.

The priest would lead a ram with the statue to the riverbank, placing the statue on a reed mat facing east under a canopy, offering sacrifices again, pouring beer, slaughtering the ram, placing a fish and a turtle of gold and silver, a bronze axe, and a copper tong inside the ram's skin, and casting these into the river, accompanied by ritual phrases.

The statue was then placed in the designated temple, completing the ritual of giving life and spirit to the statue made by craftsmen.

### **Feeding the Gods**

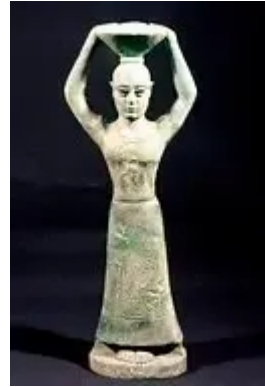
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Priests responsible for god statues performed this ritual daily, offering various foods to the gods. There were two main meals: one around noon and a secondary one before closing the temple.

Priests provided food from temple offerings, sourced from the best agricultural fields, orchards, and livestock.

These offerings also fed the temple's priests and workers. A table in front of the god's statue would hold vessels with water, drinks, food slices, and fruits.

Often, the food would be given to the king afterward to bless him or signify the connection between the god and the king.



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high-priest bearer of offerings, Ur 4000-2900 B.C.

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### **Fuhuo (Substitute Ritual)**

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This ritual involved transferring a person's misfortune to another through direct or symbolic contact. The substitute could be chosen by the afflicted person or their priest, and contact rituals were rare.

Indirect rituals (symbolic) were more common, using a doll made of dough, clay, wax, or wood representing the enemy to transfer the misfortune (e.g., illness). The doll was kept near the patient, then cast into water with a magical incantation (Namburbu).

Sometimes, animals were used as substitutes. The patient would keep a goat kid beside them overnight before the ritual.

The next day, a grave-like pit was dug where the patient and the goat kid were laid, with a symbolic and actual slaughter performed. The goat's body was treated with respect, washed, perfumed, and wrapped in the patient's clothes.

The priest would recite a mourning prayer, declaring the goat's death, symbolizing the patient's recovery. Funeral meals were offered to the goddess Ereshkigal to honor and pacify her, followed by the goat's burial, symbolizing the burial of the now-healed patient.

These rituals combined contact (animal contact) and similarity (simultaneous slaughter, exchanged clothes, respectful treatment of the goat's body, and death declaration).

### **Sacrifices**

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Sumerian ritual sacrifices varied between plant and animal offerings. The idea of human sacrifices discussed by Sir Leonard Woolley stemmed from discoveries in royal tombs in Ur, where human remains of courtiers buried with kings were found, indicating ceremonial burials.

Woolley believed these courtiers were buried with kings to ensure a peaceful afterlife.

However, the rarity of such tombs in Sumer and Mesopotamia raised doubts. Kramer explained it through the Sumerian text (The Death of Gilgamesh), suggesting the tomb was seen as a "purified palace," where the dead king was accompanied by many courtiers and offerings, similar to the royal tombs of Ur following Gilgamesh's death.

This indicates that human sacrificial rituals were royal practices that ceased after the third millennium BCE.

Plant sacrifices were frequently offered to temples, including fruits, while animal sacrifices included bulls, cattle, goats, deer, fish, pigs, and birds. Animal offerings were linked to the god's animal symbol: Enlil's bull, Nanshe's fish, and Ninurta's horses.

And in conclusion, we see how the Sumerians lived lives filled with piety and deep respect for their gods.

Through their daily rituals such as ablutions, prayers, fasting, and purification, they sought to balance the demands of the self with the dictates of nature, avoiding sin and drawing closer to the gods.

These rituals are reflected in the details of their religious life, representing a blend of deep faith and spiritual philosophy, where every element of nature and ritual played a role in cleansing the individual and elevating their spirit.

**For those who prefer visual content, you can watch the video below that covers the same topic in detail.**

[Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia - Daily Religious Rituals of the Ancient Sumerians](#)

You might also be interested in  
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Written by H. Moses

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# Sumerian Festivals Rituals from Ancient Mesopotamia

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Sumerian periodic rituals (festivals) had older roots that extended to the Neolithic period (New Stone Age). However, this did not prevent these festivals from acquiring new spiritual and ritualistic significance. The four most important Sumerian festivals are:

## Esh Esh Festival

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This is the weekly festival associated with the moon. The Sumerians relied on the moon for recording their history. The moon has four phases, and the Sumerians named each phase, assigning seven days to each. The seventh day was called "Esh Esh," meaning the day of celebrating the completion of one phase of the moon. This is precisely the origin of the concept of the weekend, and from it came the word "Saturday," derived from the Babylonian word "Sabbatu," meaning "seven." On Saturday, people rested from work and celebrated the end of a new phase of the moon.

From a mythological standpoint, the Sumerians believed that the new moon (dark moon) meant that evil spirits and demons attacked the moon and dragged it to the underworld, where it disappeared for three days.

The **myth of Enlil and Ninlil**, and the birth of the moon, indicates the moon's connection with the underworld, albeit temporarily, and that it must emerge after being redeemed by offerings. Hence, the Esh Esh festivals were accompanied by sacrifices and offerings.



## **Zamou Festival**

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“Zamou” is a Sumerian term, equivalent to the Akkadian “zag muk ka,” and it refers to a seasonal festival that represents the New Year. The Sumerians celebrated this festival twice. The first was during the spring equinox, called the "First Zamou Festival," a festival of harvest and greenery. It was celebrated with the marriage of the gods **Dumuzi and Inanna**, and sacred marriage rituals, specifically on March 21 of each year, marking the start of the Sumerian year.

The second festival, the "Second Zamou Festival," took place during the autumn equinox. It was a collective mourning ceremony for the death of Dumuzi and his descent to the underworld, celebrated on September 21 each year.

**For more about: Sumerian Religious Practices in Mesopotamia**

## **Akitu Festival**

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The Akitu Festival existed in Sumer long before the appearance of cuneiform writing. Over time, when cuneiform writing developed, this festival became a religious ritual, distinct from its original purpose.

During the Ur III dynasty and according to the Ur calendar, Akitu celebrations occurred twice a year: first in the sixth month, and second in the barley harvest month, which corresponds to the twelfth month (March–April). Rarely, it took place in the first month of the year. The festival held in the sixth month had a special name, "Aki Shunumen" or "Akiti Senunum," meaning the seed-planting period.

Ancient rainmaking traditions that appeared in Samarra were still present to some extent. It seems that the Sumerian Akitu Festival was associated with the deities Inanna and Dumuzi, with many sacrifices offered to Inanna on the eleventh day of the festival, which began on the first day of the Akitu month. Therefore, we can assume that the twelve-day festival of Akitu in Babylon originated from the Sumerian Akitu.

It's well known how this festival was celebrated in Babylon, where the rituals centered around Marduk and the renewal of the Babylonian king's

sovereignty.

From texts dating back to the Old Babylonian period, we can detect the essence of the first Akitu Festival in Ur or Sumer (which was rooted in the First Zamou Festival), a spring festival involving offerings of food to **the god Nanna** and celebrations with his wife, the goddess Ningal. This reflects the replacement of Dumuzi and Inanna with the local gods of the city. The second Akitu Festival, in the autumn, involved the moon's disappearance in its boat in the underworld, followed by mourning, a city procession, and finally the "Torch Festival," marking the end of the sorrowful celebration of the god's temporary death.

This reveals the missing link between the Sumerian Akitu Festival and the Babylonian Akitu Festival. It seems that the joyous spring rituals in Sumer for Dumuzi and Inanna were later transferred to the gods and goddesses of the cities, especially after or during the Third Dynasty of Ur. Likewise, the autumn mourning rituals became associated with the moon god Nanna, the god of Ur, and his wife Ningal, because of the temporary absence (three days) of the moon god in the underworld, which represented the time between its disappearance at the end of the lunar month and its reappearance at the start of the next month.

This laid the foundation for transferring the tradition to Marduk, the god of Babylon, whose myth also involved his disappearance in the underworld for three days or a short period. This entire mythical narrative was appropriate for placing the Sumerian and then Babylonian king at the center of it, representing Sin or Marduk, much as Dumuzi had been during early Sumerian times.

At this point, the Akitu Festival became more complex, evolving into a celebration of the king's coronation and his sacred marriage, with a mythical background referencing Marduk and the story of creation.

**For more about: Marriage and Divorce in Ancient Sumerian Civilization**

### **Ezen-Mah Festival**

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This "Great Festival" was mentioned in some Sumerian tablets and was sometimes mixed with the spring festival.

**For those who prefer visual content, you can watch the video below that covers the same topic in detail.**

**Sumerian Festivals Rituals and Myths from Ancient Mesopotamia**

Written by H. Moses

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# The Sumerian King List Before the Flood: Myth or Reality?

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## The Flood in Religious Narratives and Historical Context

If religious narratives have specified the time period between the creation of the first human (Adam) and the Great Flood, they did not explicitly determine the exact timing of the flood or its precise location. The events that transpired before the flood have been referenced only through brief mentions.

### The Fundamental Question: Was the Flood a Global or Local Event?

The primary question that scholars and archaeologists have sought to answer is whether the flood occurred in a specific region and then spread across the entire Earth or whether it was a localized event. Most archaeological evidence suggests that the flood took place in Mesopotamia, particularly in its southern region, and covered a relatively small area of land.

As for the estimated time of occurrence, researchers have dated it to approximately 3000 BCE, with a possible margin of error of  $\pm 100$  years, meaning it likely happened between 3100 and 2900 BCE.



The Sumerian King List Before the Flood



## Comparing the Sumerian and Biblical Flood Narratives

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A key aspect of this discussion is the comparison between the Sumerian figure **Ziusudra** (known as **Utnapishtim** in Babylonian mythology) and the biblical and Quranic figure of **Noah**. This parallel has led scholars to examine both the **Sumerian King List** and the genealogies in the Book of Genesis.

While the Book of Genesis provides a lineage of the early patriarchs and pre-flood prophets, the **Sumerian King List**, discovered on ancient clay tablets, records the names of early Sumerian rulers who reigned before the flood.

### The Pre-Flood Sumerian Kings

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The following version of the **Sumerian King List** is based on translations by Thorkild Jacobsen and Weld-Blundell. These versions are largely similar, with only minor differences that we will highlight. Below is the full translation of the **pre-flood section** of the list, as translated by Jacobsen from the original Sumerian text:

1. "When kingship descended from heaven,
2. It was established in **Eridu**.
3. In Eridu, **Alulim** became king,
4. And he ruled for 28,800 years.
5. Alalngar ruled for 36,000 years.
6. Two kings in total,
7. They ruled for 64,800 years.
8. Eridu then fell,
9. And its kingship was transferred to **Bad-tibira**.
10. In Bad-tibira, En-men-lu-ana
11. Ruled for 43,200 years.
12. En-men-gal-ana
13. Ruled for 28,800 years.
14. **Dumuzi-Sipa** ruled for 36,000 years.
15. Three kings in total,
16. They ruled for 108,000 years.
17. Bad-tibira then fell,

18. And its kingship was transferred to Larak.
19. In Larak, En-sipad-zid-ana
20. Ruled for 28,800 years.
21. One king in total,
22. He ruled for 28,800 years.
23. Larak then fell,
24. And its kingship was transferred to **Sippar (Zimbir)**.
25. In Sippar, En-men-dur-ana
26. Became king and ruled for 21,000 years.
27. One king in total,
28. He ruled for 21,000 years.
29. Sippar then fell,
30. And its kingship was transferred to **Shuruppak**.
31. In Shuruppak, Ubara-Tutu
32. Became king and ruled for 18,600 years.
33. One king in total,
34. He ruled for 18,600 years.
35. In total, there were five cities
36. Ruled by eight kings
37. Who collectively ruled for 241,200 years.
38. Then, the flood swept over the land.
39. After the flood had passed,
40. Kingship once again descended from heaven,
41. And it was established in **Kish**.
42. In Kish, Jushur
43. Became king,
44. And he ruled for 1,200 years."

**You might also like: List of Turin Kings: The Gods Who Ruled Egypt for 36,000 Years**

### **Analyzing the Enormous Reign Durations**

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What stands out in the pre-flood section of the **Sumerian King List** is the extraordinarily long reign durations assigned to each king. This raises an important question: could the term "year" in these records actually

represent a shorter time unit, such as a day? If so, dividing the reign periods by 365 days (or 360, based on the Sumerian calendar) would produce more realistic lifespans.

Moreover, the Sumerian numeral system used the "sar" unit, which consistently equated to 3,600. Some scholars argue that this unit does not necessarily indicate literal years but might symbolize a different measurement of time.

The list does not mention specific events during the reign of each king, except for the descent of kingship in **the first city (Eridu)** and the occurrence of the flood during the era of the last city (Shuruppak). To clarify the content of the previous tablet, we have presented it in the following simplified table:

The primary Weld-Blundell version lists nine kings ruling over five cities before the flood.

#	King's Name	Reign Duration (Years)	His City
1	Alulim	28.800	Eridu
2	Alalngar	36.000	Eridu
3	En-men-lu-ana	43.200	Bad-tibira
4	En-men-gal-ana	28.800	Bad-tibira
5	Dumuzi-Sipa	36.000	Bad-tibira
6	En-sipad-zid-ana	28.800	Larak
7	En-men-dur-ana	21.000	Sippar
8	Ubara-Tutu	18.600	Shuruppak

### The Alternative Sumerian King List: Weld-Blundell's Version

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A second version of the **Sumerian King List**, recorded on a separate clay tablet and translated by Weld-Blundell, presents some variations in both the names and reign durations of pre-flood rulers. These differences include:



Transcription of the Weld-Blundell Prism by Stephen Herbert Langdon (1876-1937), published in 1923. Date: 1 January 1923. Source: (1923) Oxford editions of cuneiform texts, Oxford University Press, pp. 1-27, Plates I-IV. Author: Stephen Herbert Langdon (1876-1937)

The primary Weld-Blundell version lists nine kings ruling over five cities before the flood.

#	King's Name	Reign Duration (Years)	His City
1	Aboulim	67.200	Eridu
2	Alagar	72.000	Eridu
3	Enmen-lu-ana	21.600	Bad-tibira
4	Enmen-gal-ana		Bad-tibira
5	Doumeuzi		Bad-tibira
6	Ensip-zi-ana	36.000	Larak
7	Enmen-dur-ana	72.000	Sippar

#	King's Name	Reign Duration (Years)	His City
8	Ubara-Tu-tu	28.800	Shuruppak
9	Zi-u-sud-ra	36.000	Shuruppak

- An extended version of the list expands this to twelve kings and seven cities.
- Unique additions include two rulers from Larsa:
  - Ki-du-un-nu, who ruled for 72,000 years.
  - A-lim-mamu, who ruled for 21,000 years.

#	King's Name	Reign Duration (Years)	His City
1	Aboulim	67.200	Eridu
2	Alagar	72.000	Eridu
3	Ki-du-un-nu	72.000	Larsa
4	A-lim-mamu	21.000	Larsa
5	Enmen-lu-ana	21.600	Bad-tibira
6	Enmen-gal-ana		Bad-tibira
7	Doumeuzi		Bad-tibira
8	Ensip-zi-ana	36.000	Larak
9	Enmen-dur-ana	72.000	Sippar
10	Ubara-Tu-tu		Shuruppak
11	su-kar-lam		sukarlam
12	Zi-u-sud-ra		Numkurru

### Variations in City Names and Ruler Identifications

Certain names and locations in these lists exhibit variations across different sources:

- En-men-dur-ana is sometimes recorded as En-men-dur-Enki, possibly referencing the **ziggurat of Nippur**.
- **Shuruppak** is sometimes spelled as Su-kar-lam or Ru-lam-kur, leading some scholars to identify it with the ancient city of Numkurru.

- Ubara-Tutu, listed as the final pre-flood king, is sometimes described as the father of **Ziusudra**, though the sources do not explicitly name him as a king.

### **Conclusion: Historical Interpretations of the Sumerian King List**

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The existence of multiple versions of the **Sumerian King List** suggests that the text underwent edits and additions over time. Scholars believe that most surviving copies were compiled no earlier than the **Third Dynasty of Ur** (circa 2112–2004 BCE), while the earliest versions may have originated in Uruk during the reign of Utu-hengal.

These lists provide a fascinating glimpse into how the Sumerians viewed their history, blending mythology with recorded events and reinforcing the divine legitimacy of kingship. While modern historians approach the exaggerated reigns with skepticism, the King List remains a vital document for understanding Sumerian civilization and its perception of time and rulership.

Written by H. Moses

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# Before the Flood: The Lost Cities and Gods of Ancient Mesopotamia

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In this article, we are not concerned with recounting the story of the Sumerian flood. Instead, our focus is on the pre-flood period, its cities, and the gods associated with them. The earliest record of this narrative comes from a tablet discovered in the ancient city of Nippur, first published by Poebel in 1914. However, the tablet was incomplete, with only its last third remaining intact.

## The Divine Kingship and the First Sumerian Cities

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The first 37 lines of the tablet were severely damaged. After that, the text briefly mentions the creation of mankind by three deities: **Anu**, **Enlil**, and **Ninhursag**, followed by the multiplication of animals and livestock. A textual gap follows until line 57, after which we read about the descent of kingship from heaven and the distribution of ruling powers among the gods, with each deity assigned to a specific city:

"When kingship descended from heaven,  
After the supreme crown of kingship was sent down from heaven,  
The cities were founded,  
(After) their locations were assigned, and their names were given.

The five great pre-flood cities and their divine patrons were:

1. Eridu – Dedicated to Nudimmud (**Enki**)
2. Bad-Tibira – Assigned to Nugig
3. Larak – Given to Pabilsag
4. Sippar – Ruled by Utu (**Shamash**), the sun god
5. Shuruppak – Dedicated to Sud



## The Lost Cities and Gods of Ancient Mesopotamia

The text then describes irrigation canals being purified, followed by a missing section that likely narrates the occurrence of the flood. Later, it mentions Nintu, who played a role in creation, and **Inanna**, who mourned for humanity. Enki pondered the matter deeply, while Anu, **Enlil**, **Enki**, and **Ninhursag** swore an oath by the names of Anu and Enlil.

During this time, King Ziusudra ruled. He was described as a pious and devout man, constantly offering prayers and supplications. He was said to have been forewarned about the coming catastrophe, not as a mere dream but as a divine revelation.

The significance of this account lies in the descent of kingship from heaven, the founding of five major cities, and the assignment of deities to each. Understanding the gods of these cities provides insight into the characteristics of the pre-flood era and its rulers, helping to unravel mysteries surrounding this ancient period.

What matters to us in this story is the descent of kingship from the heavens and its establishment in the five cities, with each city assigned to a specific deity, as summarized in the following table:

## Mesopotamian Cities and Their Deities

#	City	City's Deity	Nature	Temple
1	Eridu	Nudimmud (Enki)	One of the names of the god Enki, the god of water, wisdom, knowledge, medicine, magic, and divination.	E-Abzu (with a ziggurat)
2	Bad-Tibira	Nu (Inanna)	A title of the goddess Inanna, goddess of love and beauty. Her consort, the divine king Dumuzid (Lugal E-Mush), was also worshiped here.	E-Mush (also referred to as E-Mush Kalama)
3	Larak	Pabilsag	His name means "The Gate," and he may be associated with the Underworld. He is the husband of the goddess of healing, Ninsina, titled "Lady of Larak."	—
4	Sippar	Utu	The sun god, worshiped alongside his wife, Aya.	E-Babbar
5	Shuruppak	Sud	A goddess whose name means "The Tall One." She later became the wife of Enlil, who granted her the title "Lady of the Air."	—

## The Babylonian Flood Myth and Its Royal Figures

The Babylonian flood myth, as recounted in the Epic of Atra-Hasis and Tablet XI of the Epic of Gilgamesh, aligns with the Sumerian tradition in some key respects. However, its primary contribution to our topic is the identification of the last pre-flood kings:

1. Atra-Hasis – The last **pre-flood king in Sumerian** tradition.
  - His name translates to "Exceedingly Wise" or "Vast in Wisdom."
  - He was described as a great sage and leader, gathering the city elders at his gate, a role typically held by kings.
  - He ruled during a time when three major disasters (plague, drought, and flood) afflicted humanity.
- Utnapishtim – The last pre-flood king in the Babylonian tradition.
  - His name derives from the Akkadian words:
    - Ut (from atu) meaning "to find"
    - Pishtim (from napish) meaning "breath" or "life"

- Thus, his name means "He Who Found Life", signifying immortality or eternal life.

A direct comparison shows that Utnapishtim is the Akkadian equivalent of the Sumerian Ziusudra:

- Zi = Life
- U = Day
- Sud = Long
- Ra = Increase
- Meaning "The One Who Made Life Last Long," or simply, "The Immortal."

The 10th tablet of the Epic of Gilgamesh confirms this identity:

"O man of Shuruppak, son of Ubara-Tutu"

This statement confirms that Utnapishtim (Atra-Hasis/Ziusudra) was the son of Ubara-Tutu and ruled in Shuruppak, one of the five pre-flood cities.

### **Berosus' Account of Pre-Flood Cities and Kings**

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The Babylonian historian Berossus (Berossos), a priest of Marduk in the 3rd century BCE, wrote a history of Mesopotamia titled "Babyloniaca" (or "Chaldaica"), which covered the region's history from creation to Alexander the Great. Unfortunately, the book was lost, and only fragments survive in later Greek and Roman sources.

According to Berossus, the first pre-flood king was Anarohe, followed by Alorose, who ruled in Eridu for 28,000 years. Other key figures include:

- Alagares – Ruled for 36,000 years.
- Amelon – King of Bad-Tibira, ruled for 43,000 years.
- Amenon – During his reign, a mythical being appeared from the sea.
- Oannes – A half-man, half-fish creature who emerged from the sea to teach humanity.

Berosus' account aligns with Sumerian and Babylonian traditions, describing the divine origins of kingship and the long reigns of pre-flood monarchs. The mythical figure Oannes is closely associated with Enki

(Ea), the god of wisdom and water, often depicted wearing a fish cloak.

Berossus' king list also presents names in a Hellenized form, often ending in "-os," making direct comparisons with Sumerian records more challenging. However, his account remains valuable in reconstructing the lost history of Mesopotamian pre-flood civilization.

### Here is a table displaying Berossus' list

#	King's Name	Reign Duration	City
1	Anarohe	—	—
2	Alorose	36,000	Eridu
3	Alagares	10,800	Eridu
4	Amelon	46,800	Bad-Tibira
5	Amenon	—	Bad-Tibira
6	Amegalanes	64,800	Bad-Tibira
7	Danose	—	Bad-Tibira
8	Evedoraches	46,800	Larak
9	Amempsons	36,000	Sippar
10	Obartes	28,800	Shuruppak
11	Xisotroze	24,000	Shuruppak

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[Mesopotamia Before History: Secrets of the First Civilizations](#)

### Conclusion: The Legacy of Pre-Flood Sumerian Civilization

The pre-flood era in Sumerian and Babylonian mythology describes a time when divine rulers descended from heaven, founding great cities ruled by gods. The myths of Ziusudra, Atra-Hasis, and Utnapishtim illustrate the continuity of ancient Mesopotamian flood traditions, each highlighting a wise ruler who attained divine favor and survived the flood.

Understanding the divine kingship, its association with major deities, and the pre-flood city-states provides crucial insight into Mesopotamian cosmology, governance, and mythology. Whether through Sumerian tablets, Babylonian epics, or Berossus' lost histories, these narratives reflect a civilization deeply rooted in divine authority and celestial order.

Written by H. Moses

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# The Great Flood: Comparing Sumerian, Babylonian, and Biblical Myths

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MH [historyandmyths.com/2025/04/great-flood-sumerian-babylonian-biblical.html](https://historyandmyths.com/2025/04/great-flood-sumerian-babylonian-biblical.html)

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## The Gods of the Flood: Divine Intervention

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In Genesis, the Jewish god Yahweh sends the flood, but it is the Sumerian and Akkadian pantheon of gods that decides on the flood. This decision is not unanimous, as evidenced by the fact that in the Sumerian text, the birth goddess Nintu mourns for her human children, and Enki the Wise decides between himself and himself to help people and save lives through his favorite pious Ziusudra. Similarly, in the Babylonian text, Ishtar regrets having obeyed the decision of some in the assembly of the gods, and Ea reveals the secret of the divine decision to Utnapishtim. Indirectly, we learn at the end of the text that Enlil, like Yahweh, is primarily responsible for the Flood, and it seems that he proposed it, got the gods to approve it, and then managed it until the end. The responsibility for the flood seems to fall entirely on Enlil from Ea's words: "How did you, without thinking, bring this flood?" And from Ishtar's words: "Come forward, all of you, and approach the sacrifice. Only Enlil alone will not approach, for he has thoughtlessly caused the flood and delivered my people to destruction."



Noah's Ark (1846) by Edward Hicks (American, 1780–1849), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Public domain. Image via [Google Arts & Culture](#).

### Reasons for the Flood: Divine Wrath or Rebirth?

The Torah explicitly emphasizes the moral reasons behind the decision to destroy man; the earth has been corrupted and filled with violence and evil. The Babylonian text gives a hint of the moral reasons. At the end of the text, Ea addresses Enlil: “The guilty have borne their guilt and the unrighteous their iniquity... Give them time so that they do not perish, and do not neglect them so that they are not corrupted.” This clearly indicates that Enlil's main purpose of the flood was to eliminate evil and sinful people, destroying everyone without distinguishing between the good and the bad.

In contrast to these two texts, the Epic of Atra-Hasis proposes a strange reason for the Flood, reminiscent of the main reason for the conflict between the gods in the Genesis myth; Enlil is disturbed by the hustle and bustle of humans and decides to annihilate them after he is unable to minimize their number. But in doing so, he contradicts the main reason for the creation of humans: to carry the burden of toil for the gods. Was he

planning a new creation after the flood, as Zeus did in Greek mythology? This is a question that the myth, as it has come down to us, cannot answer.

**To learn more about the rebellion of the gods and the creation of humankind, read the following article**

[Revolt of the Gods and the Creation of Humans in Babylon](#)

### **Who Informed the Hero of the Flood?**

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All the texts agree that the announcement of the flood came from a divine source, but they differ in how the news was delivered. Ziusudra had a dream like nothing he had ever seen before, so he prayed to the gods to show him its meaning, and then he heard a voice telling him to stand behind a wall to receive the message from the god who told him the decision. Utnapishtim had a dream in which Ea addressed him from behind the wall of his reed hut, revealing to him the secret of the gods. The text of Berosus also emphasizes the dream as a means of communication.



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Enki (Ea)-informs-Utnapishtim

In the Torah, God communicates directly with Noah, without any veil or veil, and without the need for the mediation of a dream. In the person of Yahweh, the figures of El and Enlil are united, and it is Yahweh who orders

the flood and informs Noah and chooses him to survive, while in other myths this task is performed by two separate gods, one who sends the flood and the other who informs those he chooses to survive without the knowledge of the first.

## **The Ark: The Vessel of Salvation**

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The Sumerian story referred to the ship as the *Magor*, meaning the giant ship, and the Nippur text used a similar word. The Gilgamesh text called it *Elipo*, which means just a ship or boat, but describes it in various places as the great structure. The text of Gilgamesh called it *Elipo*, which means just a ship or boat, but describes it in various places as the great temple. Genesis uses only one word, which in Hebrew means box or ark.

Utnapishtim's ship has seven decks and is divided vertically into nine sections. During its construction, we do not know if it had windows, openings and doors, but we read after the flood that Utnapishtim opened a window and the light from it fell on his face. Noah's Ark, on the other hand, has three stories and an indeterminate number of sections, with a door on its side and a light opening just below the roof that goes around the ship on all sides. While Utnapishtim is unique in using oil when he soaked the fenders with one weight and stored the other two weights, he agrees with Noah on the use of pitch with which he painted the ark. However, they go back to disagreeing on the exterior shape and dimensions.

In any case, the heroes of the Flood are each in turn commanded to build a great ship to carry the seeds of life, and the divine figure intervenes more or less to determine the conditions of its construction, of which Utnapishtim seems to have been the freest.

## **The Survivors: The Animals and the Crew**

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After completing his work, Utnapishtim transferred all his gold and silver to the ship, as well as his family, relatives, and craftspeople, and pushed the wild game and beasts onto the ship and installed a navigator to whom he gave the ship's helm. Utnapishtim's act of carrying the artisans is similar in

meaning to Exoteros' act of burying the tablets containing the records of the beginning and evolution of everything. Both heroes are trying to preserve human civilization and culture from being lost and pass it on to future generations after the Flood so that they do not have to start all over again. It seems from the context of the text that Utnapishtim carried birds with him because he released some of them for reconnaissance, as well as supplies and ammunition.

From the remaining passages of the Sumerian text, we can infer that Ziusudra carried some animals with him, as evidenced by the fact that he made thanksgiving offerings to the gods with bulls and sheep. Similarly, Atra-hasis carried the wild game and beasts and as many herbivores as he could, as well as his family, relatives and craftsmen, and Axotros followed the same pattern, carrying his wife, children and close friends, storing food and drink in the ship, and carrying winged and four-legged creatures.

The Torah agrees with the Mesopotamian stories in terms of transportation of people, food, and animals, but the sheer number of people is reduced to eight: Noah, his wife, his three sons, and his sons' wives. As for the animals carried and the food, according to the Lord's commands: "Of every living thing, of every bodily form two, of every one that enters the box to live with you, male and female it shall be. Of the birds of all kinds, and of the beasts of all kinds, and of all the cattle of all kinds, and of all the beasts of the earth of all kinds, two of each shall go into the box to live with you. And you shall take of every food that is eaten, and it shall be food for you and for them." This is followed by a breakdown of clean and unclean animals.

As for how the hero of the Flood will gather all these animals, it seems that the divine figure was responsible for pushing them to him to carry them to the ark, as it seems from the epic of Atra-hasis and from Genesis. In the Epic of Atrahasis, we see Ea saying to his servant: "The game and beasts of the wilderness, and as many herbivores as I can, I will give them to you." Similarly, in Genesis, the animals come to Noah without any effort on his part to collect them: "And you shall enter the box to live with you," "Two of each shall come to you to live."

### **The Day the Flood Began**

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“In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day thereof, on that day the eyes of the flood were opened, and the caverns of heaven were opened.” It is known that the Hebrew agricultural year begins in the fall in late October, so the second month in this case is December, the beginning of the rainy season.

The story of Berosus makes the flood begin on the fifth day of May, while the rest of the texts are silent about any specific date for the beginning of the flood.

**You might also enjoy this article**

### **The Sumerian King List Before the Flood: Myth or Reality?**

#### **The Release of the Birds: Testing for Dry Land**

On the seventh day of the Flood, Utnapishtim released a dove to explore the ocean, but it soon returned because it could not find a stable footing. After an unspecified interval of time, he released a swallow, which flew off and returned, so he waited for another period, then released a raven, which flew off and did not return, so he concluded that the land was fit for landing, so he freed the inhabitants of the ark and released them to the four directions. Noah, on the other hand, started with the raven, and he showed more wisdom than his colleague Utnapishtim, because the raven loves the highlands but not the foothills and plains; therefore, its absence does not indicate that the water has receded from all the land. Then he sent the pigeon, a bird that flies only in plains and depressions, and it flew and then returned, so he waited seven days and then released the second pigeon, which flew and returned in the evening with a soft olive branch in its beak. However, the situation in general did not encourage spending the night outside the ship, so he waited another seven days and released the third pigeon, which flew and did not return, which indicated once and for all that the plains had become as dry as the highlands.

Thus, the two accounts agree in sending birds, but differ in their type and number; while Utnapishtim sends a dove, a swallow, and a raven, Noah sends a raven and three doves.

#### **The Sacrifice: Offering to the Gods**

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All the heroes of the Flood gave thanks to the gods for their survival and made sacrifices and offerings; Ziusudra prostrated himself before Utu and slaughtered a bull and offered a sacrifice of sheep; Exoterus prostrated himself on the ground and built an altar and offered a sacrifice to the gods; Utnapishtim released the passengers to the four directions and offered a sacrifice. Utnapishtim released passengers to the four directions and offered a sacrifice. And Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took from all the clean beasts, and from all the clean birds, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. Here the Babylonian text is literally identical to the Torah, after the burning of the sacrifices, we read in the Utnapishtim text: "The gods inhale the sweet odor." We read in the Torah: "The Lord smelled the odor of satisfaction."

The Lord accepts Noah's offering and repents, and makes an eternal vow not to destroy the earth again with a similar flood: "And the Lord said, 'I will no longer curse the earth ... I will no longer destroy every living thing as I have done ... I will establish my covenant with you ... This is my bow that I have made in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. In the Utnapishtim text, the gods forget their anger at humans when they smell the odor of the sacrifice and gather around its owner, delighted that life on earth has survived. There is no direct reference to a covenant with man. However, Ishtar's words suggest to us something very close to the divine covenant, and its sign, which Jehovah had a rainbow, whenever he saw it, he remembered his covenant with mankind. When Ishtar arrived, she held up her precious necklace that Anu had made to her liking and said, "O gods present, just as I do not forget the lapis lazuli necklace that adorns my neck, I will never forget these days, I will always remember them." Ishtar's lifting of her necklace is very close in content to the rainbow that Jehovah gives as a sign and covenant.

As for remorse, Ishtar expresses it when she says "All of you come forward and approach the sacrifice, but only Enlil will not approach; for he has caused the flood without thought, and has delivered my people to the flood." As Ea expresses it when he addresses Enlil: "How... Oh, how thoughtlessly have I brought this flood?" Finally, Enlil himself expresses remorse when his anger subsides, and he ascends Utnapishtim and his wife and grants them divine blessings and immortality for themselves, dwelling far away at the mouth of the rivers. Ziusudra is given eternal life in

the land of Dilmun, Exoterus receives the same blessing, and Noah also receives divine blessings from Yahweh, but these blessings do not amount to the bestowal of immortality: "And the Lord blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth."

"And the Lord blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

Written by H. Moses

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# Death and Immortality of the Gods in Mesopotamian Mythology

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MH [historyandmyths.com/2025/04/death-immortality-gods-mesopotamian.html](https://historyandmyths.com/2025/04/death-immortality-gods-mesopotamian.html)

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## Gods and Immortality in Mesopotamian Belief

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The gods are immortal, and man is dead, as the gods exist to live forever and control the destinies of existence, the world and man, and they are the main existence in the universe.

Man is secondary on the surface of the earth, as a merged body and soul, and as a soul trapped underground after death.

The Mesopotamians divided the universe into three sections: the sky, which was considered the seat of the gods; the second section, the earth; and the third section, between the sky and the earth, which separated the sky and the earth, which was personified by the god Enlil, the lord of the air. The cuneiform texts state that the earth is divided into three sections: The upper earth, on which humans' dwell, the middle earth, which is considered the seat of the god (Enki - Ea), and the lower earth, which is the underworld or the world of the dead.

The gods are mainly located in the sky, led by Anu (the sky god), who presides over the

The gods of the divine community, whose number exceeds a few thousand and are called (Igigi) and has a major authority over the community (Anunnaki), which are fifty gods who decide destinies and are based on the earth and control the major phenomena, including seven great gods who roam the earth. But they have earthly headquarters in temples and celestial headquarters in the planets.

Interestingly, Mesopotamian mythology does not refer to the existence of a heavenly paradise, but rather emphasizes the existence of seven heavens, perhaps referring to the locations of the seven planets.

each of which is located in one of the heavens.

As for the divine paradises on earth, they are two paradises, the first is (Dilmun), a land that lies far to the southeast of Mesopotamia in the Arabian Gulf, and it is mentioned in mythology as an ancient mythological deposit that reminds of a lost paradise and a golden age lived by man and

therefore limited to the gods, in which the god Enki and his wife Ninhursag, the creators of man, lived.

### **You might also like this article**

#### [Enki and Ninhursag in Dilmun: A Sumerian Mythology](#)

The second paradise on earth is Eden, which is identical to Dilmun

It is possible that the name came from the Sumerian word Edin meaning plain or easy

In addition to this general meaning, it appears from Sumerian texts from the era of the dawn of dynasties

Sumerian texts from the era of the dawn of the third dynasties around 2450 BC. Aden refers to the plain area south of the city of Umma and west of the city of Lagash, which was the cause of a long conflict between these two cities, as is clear in the Sumerian document that came to us.

(Sumerian document that came to us from Entemena , one of the princes of Lagash).

As for the underworld, which corresponds to hell, there are some gods who rule over it and are responsible for the spirits of the dead.

for the souls of the dead and an army of demons that they use to tighten their control over the lower world or cause disease and devastation in the upper world when they want to, and so on, the gods have everything, immortality, the universe and destinies, while man has death and the surface of the earth with conditions and only has to obey the gods.



## **The Permanent Death of the Gods**

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In Mesopotamian mythology, the killing of the gods was a rare occurrence, and the killing of these gods was accompanied by two basic conditions: The first is that this killing takes place for the sake of a new creation of the universe, the gods or man, and the second is that the material of the bodies of these gods does not perish, but becomes the raw material of the universe, the new gods or man, which means that their soul dies and their body remains in a new entity.

The Babylonian creation myth shows us the purpose of (the creation of the universe) from killing the old Hyllic gods, where the god (Ea) kills his father the god (Abzu) and builds his house over his body where Ea becomes the god of water and Abzu the god of deep waters, and Ea lives with his wife (Damgalnuna) in this house and gives birth to their firstborn son the god (Marduk) who grows up and is crowned king of the gods and then kills the mother goddess (Tiamat) and makes from her body the sky, the earth, the terrain, the rivers and others.

## **You might also like this article**

[Tiamat and the Enuma Elish: Monsters of Mesopotamia](#)

Thus, it is clear that the bodies of the slain gods became the material for the creation of the new universe.

As for the purpose of the creation of man, the Babylonian creation myth refers us to the process of creating man from the blood of (Kingu) the punished god mixed with clay, and another myth mentions that the god Enlil, along with the god Enki and the goddess Mama, chose one of the small gods who protested or dissented to be slaughtered and mixed his flesh and blood with dust.

Another legend states that Enlil, by order of the Anunnaki gods entrusted with heaven and earth, slaughtered a number of gods from the gods of

construction and labor of Nippur to create human beings. In general, we see that the gods die or are killed, but they do not disappear permanently, but remain in the elements of nature (the universe, the gods, and humans), as the purpose of their death is the emergence of a new, active offspring of the gods who rule over nature or create from the remains of the old gods or the creation of human beings.

of the old gods or the creation of humans who would in turn serve the gods and help them in their work.

In other words, the sacrifice of the gods was to serve the universe, nature, and immortality, not arbitrarily

The slain gods are transformed into something or someone else in nature, which does not mean their eternal demise.



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Enlil-destroys-the-rebellious-gods

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### **The temporary death of the gods**

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Although the underworld is the realm of death, it is part of the universe created by the gods. Over which they must impose their rule and control, and there are views that the underworld is a later form of the world of the



ancient dead and slain gods (such as Tiamat and Abzu) that have been transformed over time into evil agents of disease, catastrophe and even death.

diseases, disasters, and even death, but the new gods must rule this world, or it will explode with death at any time.

The gods went to the underworld for different reasons and for different periods of time. Therefore, the types of temporary death of the gods were divided according to these reasons and periods in the ancient Sumerian myth of the god Kur and his abduction of the goddess Ereshkigal, this god whose name means mountain, east or enemy, kidnaps the goddess Ereshkigal, sister of the goddess Inanna, from the upper world to the lower world, and this goddess stays there and then turns into a divine ruler over it, then she chooses a husband from the upper world (Nergal) and brings him down to the lower world to share the king of this world, and these are the only two gods who spend all their lives in the lower world as kings with a continuous line of their children and grandchildren who are gods of medicine and healing and accompanied by demons of the lower world. and healers, along with the demons of the underworld who cause disease and pestilence.

The offspring of the gods of the underworld become immune to disease and the relationship with man is restored. The upper gods give him life, strength, and labor, and the lower gods give him healing, which is a form of life and survival. The temporary death of the gods Nergal and Ereshkigal is a false death as they go there first kidnapped and then ruling and managing the underworld.

As for the temporary death the actual temporary death of the gods explains the ideology of nature's monthly, seasonal and annual cycles. Others explain natural disasters.

The mythology of monthly natural cycles is exemplified in one of the oldest and most ancient myths Sumerian mythology (Enlil and Ninlil), which explains the monthly birth of the moon, where Enlil descends, followed by Ninlil. Enlil descends, followed by Ninlil, and carries in her womb the fetus of the moon (the god Nanna) and then bears two more gods. Enlil, Ninlil and the moon are released from the underworld, while the other two gods remain in the underworld.

the other two gods remain in the underworld on the condition that at the end of each month the moon frequents the underworld to be freed three

days after its descent into the underworld.

The myth that explains the annual cycle of nature and the four seasons is the myth of the descent of Inanna or Ishtar into the underworld followed by the descent of Dumuzi or Tammuz into the underworld.

Temporary death also explains some of nature's disasters, such as the myth of Irra and Marduk which refers to the abduction of old Marduk to the underworld and the disruption of the laws of nature. This myth transfers its content to the Babylonian New Year's Day (Akitu), where it is to symbolize the turmoil at the end of a year, and Marduk's return represents a new beginning. The return of Marduk represents a new beginning.

This abduction explains the occurrence of disasters and plagues and the return of normalcy. There is another group of myths that do not involve the descent of gods into the underworld, but rather the emergence of lower beings and their clash with higher gods.

All these myths contain rich dramatic material that indicates that the permanent or temporary death of gods, their abduction, their descent into death, or their clash with death does not indicate a permanent characteristic of the gods, but rather a cosmic phenomenon.

The myths of the death of the gods are surprisingly consistent with the myths of their immortality to a strong mental structure that ancient Mesopotamian man represented in his view of the gods on the subject of death and immortality.

Written by H. Moses

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# Babylonian Job: Ludlul Bel Nemeqi -Tale of the Suffering Righteous One

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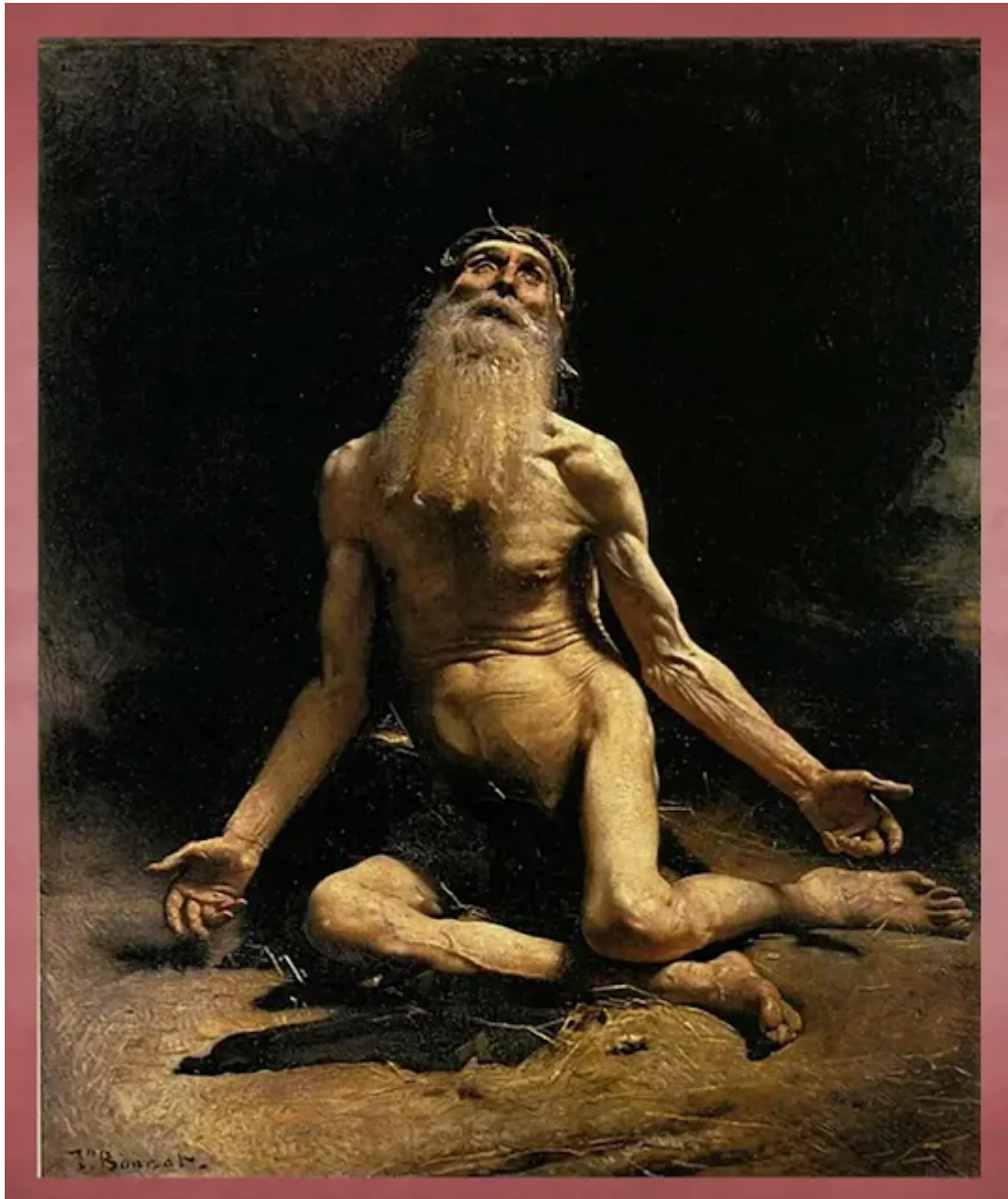
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## The Origins of the Babylonian Job: Ludlul Bel Nemeqi

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This is one of the most renowned pieces of Babylonian wisdom literature, known in its original Akkadian as Ludlul Bel Nemeqi. It has been translated multiple times and is often referred to as The Babylonian Job. Numerous studies have explored comparisons between this text and the biblical Book of Job, with the Babylonian version predating the biblical account by over a thousand years.



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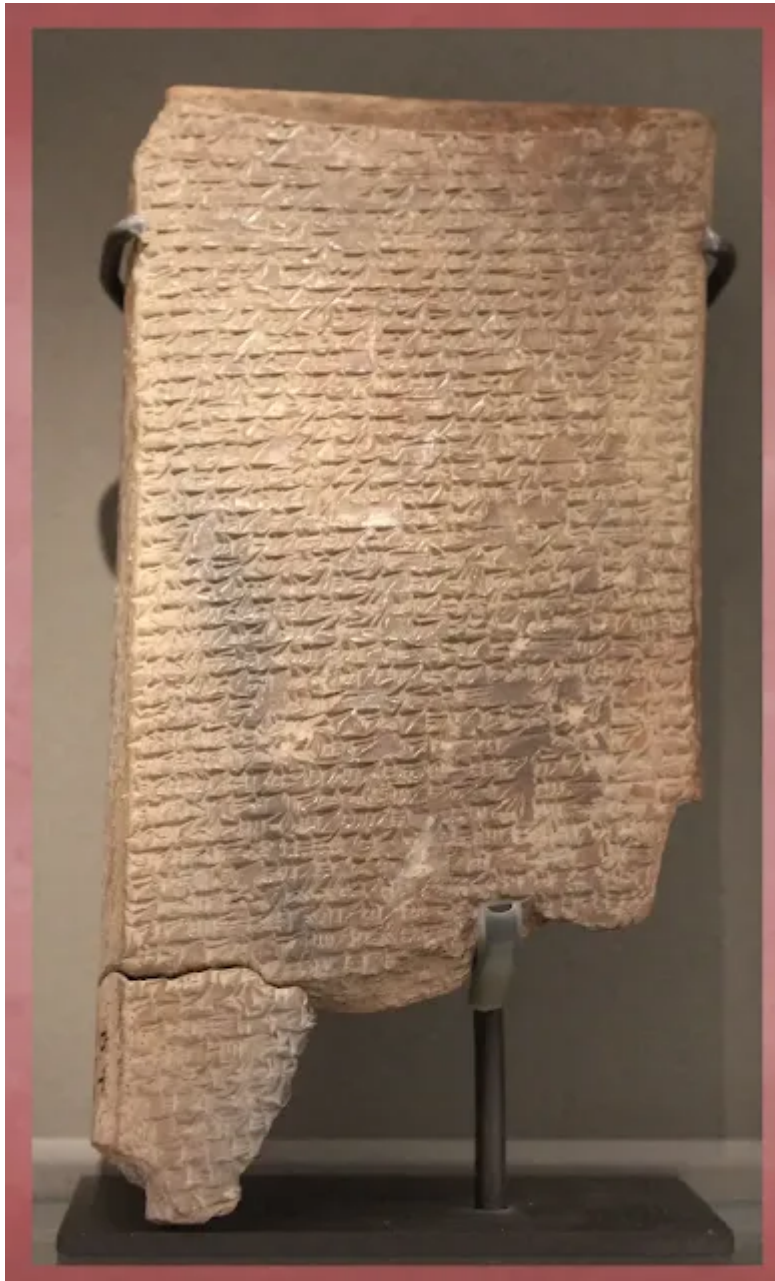
Léon Bonnat (1833–1922) | *Job* (1880) | Oil on canvas | 161 × 129 cm |  
Religious art  
Musée d'Orsay (RF 487) | Salon of 1880 | Source: [histoire-image.com](https://histoire-image.com)

The protagonist of this narrative, identified as the Babylonian Job, is Shubshi-Meshre-Shakkan. He was a righteous man, closely associated with the gods and the king, and was known for his exemplary conduct. However, he suddenly encountered a severe trial that affected him socially, psychologically, and physically, leading to his complete downfall. The text introduces two main interlocutors—one from Nippur and another from Babylon—as well as three additional speakers who engage in dialogue with him.

## **The Purpose of the Text**

The central aim of this composition is to explore the suffering that befalls a man when his god abandons him. The protagonist experiences relentless afflictions, yet the message remains one of patience and endurance. He is being tested, and if he does not blaspheme or curse his gods, the divine will ultimately return to him and relieve him of his misfortunes.

The text begins with praises to the Lord of Wisdom—Marduk. The writer describes how Marduk and his wife Zarpanit abandoned him, followed by the departure of his personal protective deity. The belief in a guardian deity (akin to an angel) was prevalent in later Babylonian traditions. Known as Lamassu (derived from the Sumerian Lama), this protective spirit interceded on behalf of individuals before the great gods, resembling the Egyptian concept of the Ka and the guardian angel in monotheistic religions.



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Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi Tablet (7th c. BC) | "Monologue of the Righteous Sufferer" | Nineveh, Ashurbanipal's Library | British Museum → Louvre | Photo: [Zunkir](#)

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### **Shakkan's Suffering: Omens, Betrayal, and Divine Abandonment**

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Shakkan's misfortunes begin with his departure from his home, aimlessly wandering as ominous signs foretell his tragic fate. These signs manifest in visions, overheard words in the streets, and cryptic messages that even his diviners and dream interpreters fail to comprehend. Social rejection follows—his colleagues at the royal court conspire against him, his servants turn against him, and even his closest allies abandon him, isolating him completely.



### **Excerpt from the First Section of the Poem**

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"I shall extol the Lord of Wisdom, the all-knowing one, who strikes the night and ushers in the day—Marduk, the Lord of Wisdom.

He who swirls all things like a storm Yet bestows calm like a gentle breeze.

None can resist him—his wrath is like a flood, Yet his heart overflows with compassion.

Even the heavens cannot endure his blows, Yet his tranquility revives the dead."

### **Shakkan laments his abandonment:**

"My god has forsaken me, my goddess has turned away, The one who walked with me has vanished.

My protective deity has deserted me, My strength has faded, and I am stripped of all care.

Ominous signs engulfed me, forcing me from my home, Wandering aimlessly, tormented by dreadful omens.

I shunned the diviners and interpreters, For I could no longer discern my fate.

The words I overheard were dire warnings, And my dreams filled me with terror."

### **His decline intensifies as royal officials conspire against him:**

"The first one declared: 'I shall end his life.' The second said: 'I will strip him of his position.' The third vowed: 'I shall seize his possessions.' The fourth plotted: 'I will take his home.' The fifth swore: 'I will ruin his life.' The sixth and seventh drove my guardian deity away."

### **These seven figures, akin to demons, unite against him:**

"With a single voice, they spewed their flames of hatred. They muzzled my fearless tongue and silenced my eloquent speech."

### **As his social status collapses:**

"My head, once held high, bowed in humiliation. My strong heart grew feeble.

My broad chest collapsed, My once-powerful arms became frail.

I walked along walls, lurking in shadows, Once a master, now a slave.

I became an outcast, pointed at in the streets. When I entered the palace, I was met with scorn.

The entire city turned against me, My homeland became my enemy.

My brother, my friend, my neighbor—all abandoned me. My own servant cursed me in court, My maid bore false witness against me.

Even my own kin regarded me as a stranger."

### **Divine Wrath, Sin, and the Mystery of Human Suffering**

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In this section, a deep theological dialogue begins, as if Shakkan realizes that the gods' anger toward him is the core of his suffering. He reflects on the nature of his relationship with the gods and how he had been fulfilling his duties to them.

This section sheds light on the concept of sin against the gods and the types of sins. A sin could be as simple as eating without mentioning the god, or it could be a direct crime against the god.

The text then transitions to the great existential questions: "Who among us knows what the gods hold in heaven or in the depths?" It addresses fate and how people's circumstances can change in an instant due to it.

In the final part of this section, the text explores the philosophy of illness and how it occurs. It suggests that the symptoms of illness in humans are manifestations of the underworld's influence, reaching humans due to their sins. For example, a cold comes from the Apsu (the abyss), and fever from the underworld. These influences attack the body's organs, causing illness and leading the person to delirium and meaningful dreams.

Read also: [Sacred Hymns of Enheduanna to the Goddess Ishtar – From Babylon](#)

**The next part of the poem reads:**

"Time passed, year after year, and no matter where I turned, calamity followed calamity and evil grew around me with no hope. I cried out to my god, but he turned his face away from me. I pleaded with him, but he did not listen. I begged my goddess, but she did not turn to me. The soothsayer could not predict my future, and the dream interpreter could not reveal my condition.

I pleaded with the spirits of the dead, but they paid no attention to me. The exorcist could not untie the knot. They say, 'His condition is strange.' Behind me lies ruin, like someone who has no offerings or like one who called his god to a meal but did not bow to him. Like one whose mouth stopped reciting prayers, who forgot the rituals of his god, who did not teach his children to respect the gods, who ate his food without mentioning his god, who forgot his gods. Remembering the gods was my joy, praying to them was my wisdom, offering to them was my duty, circling their temples was my trade, praying to them was my delight, and listening to their music was my happiness.

I taught my country and my family to respect the rituals of the gods. I respected the king and taught the people to fear the palace. I saw this as good, but what was good for us displeased the god. What we hated was good for the god. Who among us knows what the gods hold in heaven? Who among us knows what the gods hold in the depths?

How can we know the ways of the gods? Look, the one who was healthy yesterday stands on the brink of death today, and the one who was sad rejoiced for a moment and sang, then grieved again. People change in an instant. They become like corpses when they are hungry and like gods when they are full. They speak of reaching heaven when they are happy and of hitting rock bottom when they suffer. I ask myself about all this, but I do not understand what is happening.

I am exhausted, as if a whirlwind is behind me, and a wind is blowing toward me. Fever spread around me from the underworld, and a cold emerged from the Apsu. From the mountain came the demons of Utukku, and from the heart of the mountain descended the demoness Lamashtu. From the river's flood came the cold shivers, and with the greenery grew sickness.

All these pains approached me, attacked my head, and tightened around my skull. My face became gloomy, and my tears flowed. The pains crawled to my neck, paralyzed it, and struck my chest and ribs. They tormented my body and ignited a fire in my stomach. My body trembled, and the pains shook my structure like a collapsing wall.

My family mourned me, and the bolt of my door was locked. I was thrown into bed, stung by a thorny whip, and my limbs were torn apart. The exorcist could not uncover my illness, and the soothsayer could not resolve it. My grave was open. My illness caused me to lose consciousness and made me delirious. My groaning continued, and I dreamed while awake."

### **Shakkan's Dreams**

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The three dreams of the tormented Shakkan foretell the appearance of three figures in his first dream: a messenger of the goddess, her priest, and the goddess herself—possibly Sarpanitu, the wife of Marduk. All of them indicated his healing.

Dreams were seen as omens of good or evil, and this is how dream interpreters explained them.

### **The poem continues:**

"I dreamed of a tall man, dressed in pure white, radiant and awe-inspiring, standing before me. He said, 'I have been sent by the lady to tell you...' I had a second dream in which a purification priest appeared, holding a branch of tamarisk for cleansing.

He said, 'I have been sent by Lal-ur-alim, the priest of Nippur, to purify you.' He poured water over me, recited the incantation of life, and anointed my body. In the third dream, I saw a woman of stunning beauty, a queen of nations like a goddess, sitting by my bed.

I said to her, 'Plead for mercy on my behalf.' She said, 'Do not fear; I will be your intercessor.' She chanted, 'Mercy to those whose pains are like yours, whoever they may be, and to all who receive this vision.'

Then Urnandinlugga appeared to me like a young man with a beard and a turban. In his hand was a tablet, and he said, 'I have been sent by Marduk to tell you, O Shakkan, your relief is near.'"

## **The god Marduk heals Shakkan from his illnesses**

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The illness is healed when the god returns to the patient, followed by the exorcist, who restores the materials of the underworld, the Apsu, and the mountains to their places through incantations and incense.

The work concludes with praise for the god Marduk, his wife, and the guardian angel, and the fulfillment of the vow made by the healed patient by performing rituals before Marduk's temple and setting up a feast. The just man returns to his normal state thanks to Marduk, ritually passing through the twelve gates of Marduk's temple in Babylon.

### **The poem says:**

"Marduk gave me a sign. He rescued me from my illness and freed me from my bonds. My god's heart was appeased, and he accepted my prayers. He granted me grace and untied the knot of my sins. He made the wind carry away my sins.

The exorcist placed the incantation near me and drove the evil wind to the horizons. He returned the fever, the cold, the demon Utukku, Lamashtu, and the shivers to their places. He dispelled the numbness like smoke. He carried away my calamities and groans to the earth. He removed the pain from my head, the residues of death from my eyes, the silence from my ears, the fever from my nose, the flame from my lips, and the mist from my mouth.

Marduk, who closed the mouth of the lion that was devouring me, Marduk, who removed the sling of the one pursuing me on the riverbank. He anointed my forehead, and the people saw Marduk restore me to life. Who will see the sun without Marduk?

Who will walk his path without him? Marduk, who revives the dead—sing to him and glorify him, O people. And now I have returned to prostrating myself. At his gates, my guardian angel has returned.

At the gates of salvation, life, the sun, clarity, the herald, the absolution of sins, praises, the suppression of groans, pure water, salvation, and ultimate perfection, I stood. I placed fragrant incense before me and piled

up offerings and sacrifices. I sacrificed fattened bulls, slaughtered sheep, and offered wine and honey. For Marduk, my guardian angel, the priests, and the temple, I spread abundant tables of food that gladdened hearts."

Written by H. Moses

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